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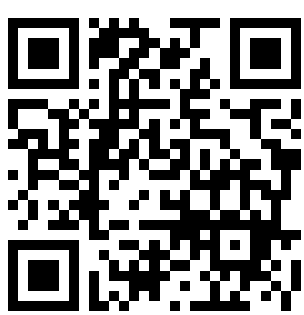

ERIC GILL

Joseph Thorp

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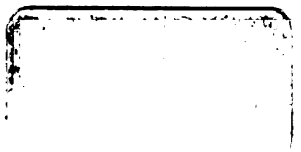

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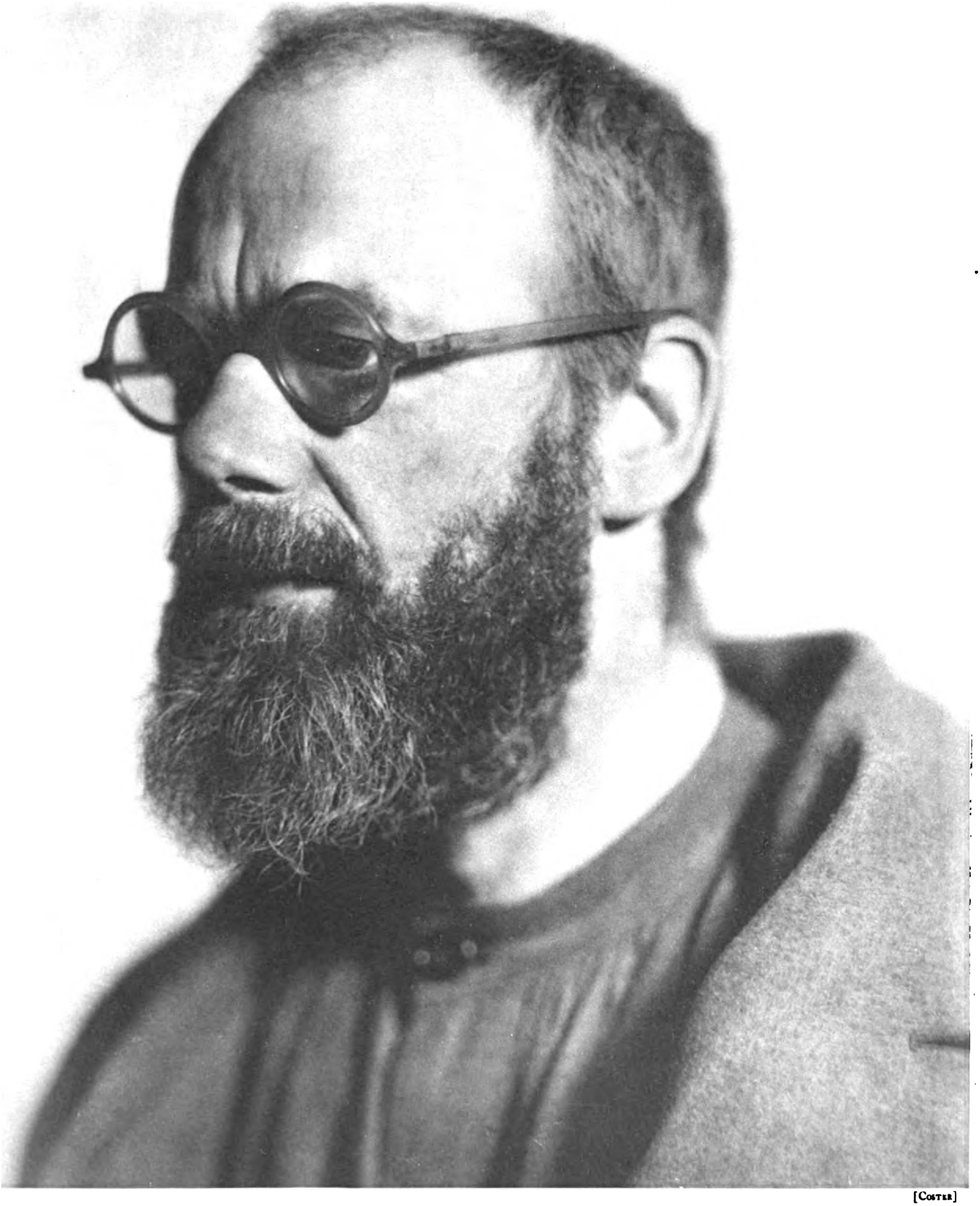

[Coster]

ERIC GILL

To face Title-page

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ERIC GILL

by Joseph Thorp

With a critical monograph by
Charles Marriott

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A LIST OF BOOKS BY ERIC GILL relating directly or indirectly to the theory and practice of Art.

Sculpture: an essay on stone-cutting, with a preface about God.	[St. Dominic's Press] 1918.
Songs without clothes.	[St. Dominic's Press] 1921.
Id quod visum placet.	[Published by the Author] 1926.
Art and Love.	[Douglas Cleverdon] 1927.
Christianity and Art.	[Francis Walterson] 1928.
Art and Prudence.	[Golden Cockerell Press] 1928.

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PREFACE

THIS book concerns itself chiefly with the sculpture of Eric Gill. A few reproductions in facsimile of his beautiful drawings have been included. His wood-engraving is definitely excluded as Mr. Douglas Cleverdon of Bristol proposes to deal comprehensively with that in a forthcoming publication.

Adequate presentation of the subtleties of tone and texture, of plane and contour in carved stone is not easily attained, especially when the scale is so much reduced. When experimenting with alternative methods of presentation, I did definitely discover that the extension of the dark background as far as technical considerations permitted gave the best results because it prevented the distracting irradiation from the more usual wide white margin.

It is, I must suppose, this relatively satisfactory arrangement (backed by Messrs. Whittingham and Griggs' quite admirable collotype technique) which has converted the artist from a mood of apparently uncompromising disapproval of the writer's well-intentioned project—an hostility of principle ('my trade owes nothing to your trade'), not of mere cantankerousness—into at least a mitigated approval. Perhaps I might even put it higher than that.

I had better make the naïve confession at the outset that

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I was moved to this self-imposed task by a very sincere gratitude for continued pleasure in the work and the continuously surprising development of this craftsman-artist; and for at least a partial clarification of a puzzled mind as to the significance and purpose of that mysterious efflorescence of the human spirit which we call Art. Being, too, by nature something of a propagandist, I cherished also perhaps some half-defined hope that reproduction of these examples of Eric Gill's work in stone might be useful to those who may have wandered with me in the arid deserts of preference for sentimental realism and dexterous illusionist art or may be still wandering therein.

Sophisticated persons are welcome to smile at this admission. With them in view I invited Charles Marriott, whose perceptive appreciations of current work, so aptly phrased and so free from the tiresome jargon of his trade, are well known, to write a brief critical monograph which should have more authority than I could command. And I here express my gratitude to him for his kindly and effective co-operation. Nor must I omit to thank that accomplished photographer, Howard Coster, whose skill was put at my disposal and whose obviously disinterested enthusiasm for his job disarmed the reluctance of our sitter when we suddenly presented ourselves on the hill-side of distant Capel-y-ffin, confidently, if basely, reckoning on the sacred tradition of hospitality not to be sent empty away. The student of character should find in the portrait of Gill and the study of the hands an interesting commentary on the sitter's work and opinions. The photograph of the interior of his studio in which nothing was arranged (not even the poses, which were simply seized as they occurred with an almost passionate 'Hold that!') might almost be a painter's picture of the Dutch School.

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I have to thank the Goupil Gallery for the use of many of the photographs reproduced here.

The measurements of the sculptures are only approximate, but sufficiently accurate to give an indication of the important factor of scale.

The letters of the artist's name at the head of the title-page have been drawn by Mr. Henry Ball after a beautiful alphabet drawn with a brush by Eric Gill many years ago. I hope he will forgive this translation as it solved satisfactorily for us a problem of weight and colour.

J. P. T.

Arundel, 1928.

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ERIC GILL AS CARVER

AS carver—I prefer the word to sculptor because it describes the action more precisely—Eric Gill has escaped the two heresies that lie in wait for the artist: 'Nature' and 'abstract form.' They are heresies in the strict meaning of the word, because they isolate and make too much of a part of the truth. Art is concerned with nature and with abstract form but it is concerned with them only through substance, and the concern varies with the kind of substance. Carving is concerned with Nature and with abstract form through what may be called, inclusively, stone, and it is because Eric Gill has a strong sense of stone that he has escaped the two heresies that lie in wait for the artist according to his temperament. His carving is both imitative of nature and abstract in form, but it is imitative and abstract only so far as stone allows.

It is interesting to observe that the heretical tendencies noted above vary not only with temperament but with period. Nowadays it is generally understood that carving should not be more imitative of nature than stone allows, but it is not so generally understood that carving should not be more abstract than stone allows. The reason for this is quite simple. With all its positive contributions to truth the modern movement in art is a reaction from an opposite heresy, and a reaction

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from one heresy almost invariably leads to another. The apostles of both unduly imitative and unduly abstract carving argue against each other without reference to the nature of stone. In the homely phrase, they 'reckon without their host.' It is probable, though this is not my business, that religious heresies follow the same rule. They are argued one against another without reference to human nature, which is the deciding condition in all approaches to Divine Truth. At any rate it is certain that the way to correct an artistic heresy is not to fly to its opposite but to refer to the condition which would prevent both; and it is both encouraging and amusing to note that in so far as the modern heresy is correcting itself it is by reference to the materials of art. As Van Gogh said, 'Be true to your palette and nature results,' and modern carving is 'getting back to nature' not by direct reference to nature but rather by reference to stone. Just as in life there is no escape from human nature, so in art there is no escape from the nature of things.

Having a strong sense of stone Eric Gill has never fallen into either heresy, the unduly imitative or the unduly abstract, and so he has never been tempted to correct his work by arguing one against the other. For him the only appeal is the appeal to stone. In the same way he has never been confused as between modelling and carving. All the arguments for and against 'direct carving' would be spared if it were remembered that modelling and carving are different human actions, originating respectively in the boy making a mud pie and the boy whittling a stick. No boy would confuse the two actions, or make one a prelude to the other—as is done when a modelled form is transferred to stone by 'pointing'; and the clinching argument for 'direct carving' is that it keeps a

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THE SCULPTOR'S HANDS

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specific human action distinct, with the particular truth to Nature and degree of abstraction which belong to it and not to the action of modelling, which has its own kind of truth and abstraction.

But beside his strong sense of stone and of the human action involved in its carving Eric Gill has another advantage which distinguishes him from most modern sculptors. He began as a letterer, that is to say, as a carver of abstract forms which had yet a symbolical meaning. This advantage can hardly be overestimated because, by including representational significance as part of the carver's art from the beginning, it avoids the contradiction in terms of trying to be purely abstract in a concrete substance. For it is not so much 'Nature' as substance that compels the plastic arts to be representational —except when, as in architecture or pottery, the substance is absorbed in some practical function.

Beginning as a letterer, with a complete command of stone and of the human action involved in carving, Eric Gill has progressed by a wary approach to the appearances of Nature through stone. This involves a wedding, a sacramental union, of the substances of Nature—as of flesh—with the substance of stone, and the consequent creation of a new form, partaking of the nature of both. For it is the essence of Eric Gill's art that form cannot be considered without reference to substance. According to subject and mood his work may be more 'abstract' or more 'naturalistic,' but, in either direction, the degree is limited by the substance in which he is working. In his approaches to naturalism Eric Gill shows that, in addition to his strong feeling for stone, he has a sensuous—even an erotic—feeling for the substances of nature, of the human body, for instance. The reconciliation of this eroticism

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with the character of stone, so that—though the treatment is never imitative—the stone appears to tremble on the brink of flesh is, to me, one of the most interesting aspects of his art. It supports an old belief that the processes of art are parallel to the process of Redemption—in which nothing of human nature must be left out in the return to God. It is the artistic parallel to the mystery of the Incarnation. Instead of 'the Word made Flesh' the flesh is made stone. If Eric Gill is a Mystic—he would probably hate the suggestion—it is in this pursuit of form through substance along the line of least resistance, so to speak, both in the stone and in the substance to be represented according to his desires. Paradoxical as it may sound, nothing is harder to find than the line of least resistance in the approach to form. It is the same in Art as in Life. As the Puritans and other heretics have shown us, it is much easier to suppress the bodily desires and affections than to bring them to fulfilment in the Divine Will, and it is because Eric Gill attempts the more difficult way in Art that his work appeals to me more strongly than that of most modern sculptors. His frank response to Nature distinguishes him from the Puritans in art and at the same time keeps him from the vice of self-expression—for self-expression in art is a form of self-abuse.

Observe that I do not say anything about the religious character of Eric Gill's art in the matter of subject; all that I am concerned with here is the essentially religious character of his artistic methods; the formal fulfilment of his reactions to Nature in terms of stone. All art, whatever the subject, is praise; but the praise—as we learn from *Omnia Opera*—must be in the voice of the creature, of the creature as artist and the creature as stone; and not, as the heretics on either

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side would suppose, by direct imitation of Nature or formal perfection in the abstract.

Like all other artists Eric Gill has his ups and downs in the difficult way along the line of least resistance to formal perfection, but he always keeps to the way and avoids heretical short cuts. In *Mankind*, for instance, he seems to me to have been to some extent seduced by the appeal of Nature from loyalty, not to stone, but to scale. It is not easy to find a rule for the relation of scale to substance, but I feel that there is one and that large occasions require formal conduct—as the mountain is more abstract than the flower, or a public gathering than a private encounter. *Mankind* is, so to speak, rather too intimate for its occasion—producing upon me the effect of private praise when something liturgical is required. But this is a personal experience, quoted to suggest how, in art, conduct is complicated by occasion, rather than to compare the works of the artist in merit. Nor do I feel inclined, here, to dwell upon how nicely Eric Gill adapts his workmanship to the particular substance—the different kinds of native stone, marble, wood, ivory, or whatever it may be. The truth is that the artist who has once felt the necessity of reaching form through substance—of finding the line of least resistance through its nature and his own to formal perfection —in one material will feel it in all the rest, though some may be more congenial to him than others. Herein art does not differ from life, in which, though we may conduct some occasions better than others, being true to the whole of ourselves will carry us reasonably well through all.

CHARLES MARRIOTT

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ERIC GILL

ERIC GILL, like many of the conspicuously creative artists, is extraordinarily versatile, a diligent experimenter refusing to be limited to any one medium. He has established a unique reputation as a wood-engraver with a highly individualized technique; with excursions, by way of variation, into the cutting of intaglio blocks and plates —again refusing to follow any known model. In 1927 he began to make drawings of a delicacy and sensitiveness which alone would be sufficient to establish a supreme reputation. It is unlikely that he will be seriously tempted to paint, his dominating interest is so obviously in form and line. But certainly it would be unsafe to prophesy. He also writes with style and point—the style occasionally deformed by a too studied imitation of the method of the Angelic Doctor, the point blunted at times by too controversial a mood. It is always writing that commands attention and expresses the writer's thought of the moment with effective simplicity and vigour.

I asked him recently: 'How on earth did you suddenly become a draughtsman of this quality?' 'Well, you know how it is. When you're young you have all sorts of modesties and inhibitions. You see a wallpaper and you say, "I could never do wallpapers." Later you say "Dash it all, I'll do a wallpaper," and you do it, though it isn't the least like the one you saw and thought you couldn't do.' I quote this trivial *obiter*

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dictum because it happens that he was inclined to lose heart at one time in early youth because he couldn't make drawings like Herbert Railton! And when, after his apprenticeship to stonecutting with special attention to letter-cutting, he began to play with a chisel on a block of stone and cut a figure, clumsy and inadequate as he thought (and perhaps in fact), it was Count Kessler of Weimar who recognized the sign manual of the born sculptor, the true stone carver. He encouraged him to address himself to this business and informed him that he was working in the same mood and tradition as Maillol.

Kessler prevailed on him to go to Paris with a view to studying under Maillol, and his sudden flight back to England on the following day in the conviction that Paris was no place for him and that he had much better go his own way, is eminently characteristic. It is indeed unlikely that Maillol or any other would have long shackled his intense individuality, but it is as well that we are able to point to Eric Gill as sole maker of his own artistic destiny, owing nothing, by way at any rate of imitation, to any master, school, or period.

The facts about Eric Gill's life and training, so far as they are appropriate to this brief note, may here be given. He was born in 1882, in Brighton—of all places!—and as soon as he could handle pencil and pen began to draw engines with a sedulous passion. I have seen these early works. They show no signs of the precocity of genius. The family happily removed to Chichester when Eric Gill was fifteen and in this beautiful town there were the Cathedral, the Cross, and a dozen or so of really comely and seemly buildings for him to set to work and make drawings of—and as I have said he failed completely to draw like the skilful but entirely uninspired Railton!

Evidently not cut to the pattern of an artist—though he

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did well enough in the local art school—he would be an architect (his father, now a Clergyman of the Church of England, being biassed in favour of that admirable profession), and in 1899 he was articled to the architect to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, William Douglas Caroë, in whose office he stayed the inside of three years. During this period he attended evening classes at the Central Schools of Arts and Crafts under Edward Johnston, in whom he recognized his first real master and teacher—and in fact his last. This indeed was a happy association—ripened later into friendship—in that it directed Eric Gill in the invaluable formal discipline of letter making which had so much to do with the development of his dexterous technique, and gave him a hand skilled to interpret the visions in his mind when later the creative mood came irresistibly, but, in comparison with most artists, belatedly upon him. He was at this time also learning the craft of stonecutting at the Westminster Technical Institute—finding himself specially interested in the cutting of letters according to the principles and examples of his distinguished teacher. Edward Johnston has made his own conspicuous place as scholarly revivalist of the tradition of the fine letter, as inspiring teacher and as incomparable calligrapher. It will be reckoned no light addition to his fame that he had this signal share in the making of Eric Gill.

Gill set up as something very like a master-mason in 1904—charging two shillings an hour for his time. Artists, architects, and others interested in or actively carrying on the revival of sane craftsmanship inspired by Morris, were his natural patrons. It was actually J. D. Batten who gave him his first commission—a tombstone inscription. The 'mason's' bill was three pounds, the artist sent him five. Edward Prior,

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who had encouraged and exercised a great and wholesomely formative influence upon him about this time, commissioned him to cut the inscription on the pediment of the Medical School at Cambridge. Emery Walker had before this introduced him to Count Kessler, for whom he had designed and drawn the title-pages for the Insel Verlag pocket edition of German classics, a thing I imagine he would now refuse to do, holding that it would be a printer's job for type. Walker also brought him to the notice of St. John Hornby, master-printer, and for Hornby in the capacity of partner of W. H. Smith and Sons he carried out a modest architectural job—a shop front at Bournemouth, and painted a dozen or so of the shop signs himself. Later he designed the lettering for the name over the shop fronts of that firm. His energies were, however, almost entirely given to his mason's work—the training of a few pupils being a natural and practical addition to his labours.

By 1910 he was seriously engaged upon the wood-engraving, which he has developed with so markedly individual a technique, and it was in 1910 that he began those halting experiments in direct carving of figure subjects in stone which have flowered so splendidly. It is fashionable nowadays in the best artistic circles to suspect any marked dexterity of hand—and no doubt the suspicion has an honourable basis—but it is impossible to suggest on the evidence that his increasing mastery of his tools and of his medium has outstripped the vision in his mind. As early as this then his passionately held theory of the conditions requisite for the production of vital art was being undermined. He was being drawn away from the honest forthright business of doing jobs of work for a specific purpose into the discrete and (theoretically) unwholesome circle of the artists—with

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eventual results which in practice there is singularly little reason to deplore.

In 1913 this serious-minded artist, who had wandered out of Anglicanism into Agnosticism, and tried in vain to fashion a satisfactory basis for his life and assuage with Fabian doctrine his passionate disgust with the sorry scheme of things as they are, took the, for him, inevitable step of becoming a Catholic ('Fabianism was simply not what I thought it was'). The Catholic Church is his natural, inevitable, spiritual home, and of few artists can it be said that their religion has had so marked, so universally pervading an effect on their work and their aesthetic—of none perhaps in our own country since the golden age of faith but William Blake.

It is still a matter of pride and principle with Eric Gill to think of himself as a workman rather than as an artist; to deplore the setting aside of a special class of persons labelled artists, devoted to the business and subject to the hazards of 'self-expression.' Art should come to life naturally, he holds, through the well-making of something commissioned for a definite purpose or occasion—if for no other reason than that 'hardly one man in a million can really be trusted not to make a fool of himself unless he be tied up and tied down by some sort of utilitarian purpose. Ask a sculptor to supply you with a nice shaped stone' (but does one ask this?) 'and if you do not tell him of some purpose the stone will serve he will be at a loss, and will turn out some formless gimcrack or sentimental nudity suitable only for road metal.'

'Every workman has the call to be an artist,' he writes somewhere and implies everywhere in his many attempts to formulate his austere aesthetic creed. 'It is an abnormal condition of things wherein we differentiate between ordinary

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workmen and artists. The normal differentiation is simply between one *kind* of artist and another. Thus in a normal human society a mason and a sculptor of images are simply different kinds of artist. The violent distinction of artist and not-artist could hardly exist among workmen in such civilizations as those of Rajput India or Mediaeval Europe.'

It is in fact implicit in everything that Eric Gill says and writes, that his main quarrel with the world to-day is that the developments of the industrial revolution—mass production by machine and the limiting of the job of the workman to the doing of some small part, without individual responsibility, of a job organized by others—have robbed man of one of his chief natural joys, the making of things as well as they may be made. The workman now in fact 'makes' nothing; he merely 'does'—does what he is told with no real, indeed no possible, interest in the thing produced except in so far as it brings him a wage. The curse of Adam is indeed fulfilled in his latter day children.

No thoughtful person surely with any real sense of values can fail to appreciate the force of this general indictment, but in Eric Gill this hatred of the betrayal of the normal man by deprivation of the chance of exercising his creative faculty rises to the height of a master-passion. And he traces the source of this corruption to the decay of Religion at the close of the Middle Ages, the arrogant human pride and restlessness of the Renaissance and the supreme disaster of the industrial revolution—with the consequent dominance of the machine and the enslavement of Man the Worker. It may I think be fairly suggested, without questioning the fundamental sanity of much of his criticism, that he is apt to turn his rose-coloured lenses upon the ages of faith and his smoked glasses

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upon the succeeding periods. It is also possible that the artist in his modesty, fortified by elaborately developed theory, is mistaken in taking himself for a normal workman.

Happily for us in Eric Gill the need for self-expression in creative work, other than that commissioned for a definite purpose, has been too strong to be denied—this need being helped naturally by the corrupt conditions of the time! He has, however, always been consistently fortunate in receiving a steady flow of commissions 'in the ordinary way of business in accordance with his fundamental theory. He must indeed have laboured with astonishing industry as since 1904 he has done something not far short of a thousand jobs of work in stone (all neatly catalogued in his beautiful handwriting), apart from his work with graver, pencil, pen—and tongue. To this stern discipline of continuous work, done always as well—and as thoughtfully—as it could be done according to his master-ideal, he owes naturally the amazing swiftness and dexterity of his craftsmanship, and also, more fundamentally, the enlargement of his vision. I have known critics refer to his 'relatively small output.' This should of course read 'relatively small body of formally exhibited work.'

Eric Gill's intense preoccupation with the doctrines, traditions, and literature of Catholicism is seen in the choice of his subjects, even when his work is unconditioned. He breaks out now and then in a jolly paganism, which, I suspect from hints conveyed in *Art and Love* and other writings, he would claim rather as a fulfilment than a contradiction of his dominant mood. His two most important church commissions were the two sets of Stations of the Cross for Westminster Cathedral and St. Cuthbert's at Bradford. When the authorities of the Cathedral, early in 1914, with a rare perspicacity and courage

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entrusted him with the work, they must have had grave misgivings: and no doubt most of the faithful, clergy as well as laity, devoted to the sticky sentimentalities of the Munich and Birmingham schools, were duly horrified. No doubt also many of them found to their surprise that this fine austerity of treatment made the normal products of ecclesiastical factory art look uncomfortably tawdry and ignoble—as a Mass of Palestrina is apt to expose the saccharine vulgarities of Gounod's *Messe Solennelle*—for those who have ears to hear.

Such ears and such eyes are, it must be supposed, rare among his co-religionists. With a logic that should be appreciated by outsiders, the Church authorities are not interested in statues, stations, or windows as works of art, but merely as aids to devotion; and it is generally assumed that what is best for devotion is 'what the public wants'—an opinion easier to deplore than disprove. Those who think the decay of religion responsible for the decay of art, must bear with the irony of this situation as best they may.

This indifference is a loss to Catholics and a genuine personal loss to the sculptor, who would quite definitely prefer to carry on his trade as honest workman along the lines mapped out by his own thinking. But I cannot think it a loss to Art—if he will forgive me the capital—or to the Artist—if he will accept the category. For it has freed him for work which might have been perforce laid aside. Certainly we we should regret the loss of the singularly beautiful *Girl in Capel-y-ffin Stone*; the impassioned *Foster-Father*; the noble sensuousness of the torso '*Mankind*'; the vigorous *Torso in Bathstone*; the *Tobias and Sara* and the *Adam* and *Eve* (which, though they might be considered religious subjects, are not at any rate conceived in the contemporary ecclesiastical

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mood); the jolly little pagan joke of '*The Splits*' and the graciously bizarre beauty of '*The Headdress*.' It is an ill wind that blows nobody good!

Indeed, it is all very well for Eric Gill in his modesty and in the interests of a passionately held theory to refuse to recognize the essential difference between artist and craftsman. Those of us who are craftsmen and, alas, not artists, have the best reason to know the truth about this business. To call by the same name the ability to carve *The Headdress* and the ability to make with skilled hands and honest intent a well-planned table, is to trifle with words. Nor would the breaking of all the machines, the hanging of all the men of commerce, and the return, however general, to the feet of St. Peter convert the one type into the other. It is, of course, quite possible that fewer artists would be spiritually starved (and, to be just to the present system, many more ordinary men and women actually go hungry) but that is not to say the same thing. The discussion is purely academic—or, as so often, a question of terms and definitions. I am much afraid Eric Gill will have to submit to a verdict of posterity that he is in, and highly placed in, the sanctified class of creative artists, though his angry ghost may walk the earth protesting against any such interpretation of the facts.

Many no doubt may be puzzled to reconcile the religious with the pagan moods of this artist. The more conventional of co-religionists and other honest simple persons do no doubt look on the whole business as a Jekyll and Hyde affair (a very eccentric Jekyll and a highly deplorable Hyde!) Yet, clearly, there is nothing 'disturbing,' except to the hyper-sensitive mind, even in the frankest of his sculptures, drawings, or engravings, an obvious sincerity and detachment

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informing the work. The illusionist school would make a very different affair of the same subjects. But there are weaker brethren everywhere. What of them? Eric is as resolute to defend the artist's right to see beauty where he will and express it in the spirit of the Songs of Solomon, as to uphold the Church's right rigidly to define all details of doctrine and moral conduct. And he would no doubt justifiably adapt the ancient Father's dictum, 'What God has not been ashamed to create we need not be ashamed to discuss.' It is, he conceives, the priest's business, if he feels it necessary, to warn the little ones against contemplation of the artist's work; and the business of the policeman in extreme cases to refuse a licence for exhibition. But neither policeman nor priest may dictate to the artist what he shall do or how he shall do it.

In his reasoned defence of the artist's position in *Art and Love* when dealing with the 'hieratic' art of India, there is a clue to the working of his mind in this matter and a light thrown on his own artist's creed:

'Before all is destroyed let us admire and praise the works of her past and especially those which most poignantly embody the recognition of man's love of God, and of God's love for man. The necessary timidity of town-ridden England, nay, the necessary restrictions imposed upon the idiosyncrasy of painters and poets need not blind us to the fact that the physical union of lovers is a God-appointed act and that its representation in word or work is not *in itself* an evil thing. But, photographically depicted, sex representation fails of its justification, and in the all-pervading photography of modern European art, wherein everything which is not photographic is thought to belong to a lower order of things, it is not tolerable. This is necessary and right. Where you have the

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copying of nature regarded as the chief aim of the artist it is necessary that the artist be warned off those particular things in nature which, viewed merely photographically, are the most provocative of disorder. Only where the non-photographic, the conventional, the symbolic, the hieratic, is regarded as being the proper nature of artistic work and all else is regarded as indecency, *tour de force* or triviality, only there can you have the representation of marriage either holily conceived or tolerably executed. Such conditions do not exist in England to-day; such conditions have already almost departed from India.

'In fact all photographic representation is indecent, whether it be concerned with the human body or anything else. The photographic representation of the intimacy of lovers is to be thought more indecent than such representation of landscape only because it is more provocative of disorder, for no other reason. The more the mind is weaned from this cult of verisimilitude, the more do such exhibitions as that of the Royal Academy become revolting in their indecent blandishments of merely personal human emotion.

'But it must not be supposed that a conventional style of art was originally or may now be used as a cloak for sensualism. Hieratic is indeed a more appropriate word than conventional. Hieratic art, that is a priestly art, an art in accordance with priestly dictation, is that style of art in which divine meaning is enshrined in material works.' (Here a characteristic footnote: 'Far be it from us to imply that artists should submit to the artistic dictation of priests. At the altar and in the confessional the priest is impregnable, but as critic of the works of men he is often beneath contempt. The priestly dictation which is the basis of hieratic art is not

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aesthetic; it is moral and dogmatic.') 'By Catholic philosophers it is said that "the soul is the *form* of the body," and of hieratic art it may be said that divinity is the *form* of it—the form, that is the formative principle, the thing in accordance with whose nature and powers the material body takes shape. The form of an hieratic art is the divine rule, the divine order.

'Is it possible that the strongest of all the passions can be correlated to a divine order? Is it possible that, in pictorial or literary art, the passions of men can be subordinated to a divine rule? If it should be thought that we are assuming too much in saying that the worships and images of primitive or alien peoples are anything but sensuality let us remember that the present frame of mind of the town-bred people of Europe is such as to make it almost impossible for them to think clearly on the subject. Because we worship ourselves and are rightly afraid to withdraw the police supervision of our public picture galleries it does not follow that other peoples and other ages see no more of God in nature than we do. Let us also remember the literature of Christianity. From the Canticle of Canticles to St. Bernard and St. John of the Cross, from St. Teresa of Avila to St. Thérèse of Lisieux the theme of love has never been without vivid and unveiled expression. And if the paintings and sculptures of mediaeval Europe are less unclothed than those of India the differences of climate and race are sufficient explanation. In all cases, however unconsciously and with whatever accompaniment of philosophical error and uncouth theology, God has been worshipped as the lover, the fount of love, Love itself. The blatantly phallic art of Central African tribes is no more a degradation than is the blatantly photographic art of modern

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Europe—no more and no less. Both are departures from the norm of human understanding; both are the product of mental decay. The norm is seen in the early art of Greece, in the early art of mediaeval Europe, in the peasant art of all the world, in the Plain Chant of the Roman Church and in all such music and, pre-eminently, in Rajput painting and the sculptures of India and China. But to all these arts the photographic is abhorrent. All are hieratic arts; all are the arts of peoples for whom religion is the main motive and of whose religion love is the beginning and the end.'

Clearly this is the writing of a man who does his own thinking and knows how to use a pen. And I am tempted to add, without comment, another passage (from the same essay) on the philosophy of clothes which suggests that he might give us a new and entertaining *Sartor Resartus*. 'Neither nakedness nor covering are to be taken as indicative of right-mindedness. We demand a certain minimum of covering for the sake of social order and, whether enforced or not, we use a certain minimum for the sake of privacy because community of goods, unlike community of mind, is hateful to man—hateful because destructive of his quality—destructive because dissipating. But primarily, and speaking in an absolute sense, clothes are neither for convenience nor for decency. Clothes are for dignity and adornment. This may sound ridiculous when we call to mind the clothes of modern Europe and America. But such clothes are a degradation and this degradation has come about simply because we have allowed notions of convenience and decency to override and destroy the notion of dignity. We actually think that clothes should fit the body! They should do no such thing. They should no more fit the body than the mane of a lion or the toga of a Roman. We

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think it indecent not to wear body-fitting underclothes. It is not. If worn for the sake of warmth, such garments are allowable; otherwise they have no business to exist!

'Nothing is more clearly indicative of the degradation of the modern world than the dress of modern men, and the argument that it is convenient is dragging women into the same degradation. But the essence of indecency as of all sins is injustice. It is unjust to cause displeasure. How could it be anything but unpleasant to see the misshapen limbs, the slack paunches, the untutored organs of modern town-bred people. That we endure our faces and hands is surprising enough. How vastly preferable is the state of affairs in convents where even heads and hands are covered. How easily, we may believe, monks and nuns could, if they would, show us bodies as tutored, and as beautiful because as tutored, as their minds. Fat, perhaps, like the Angelic Doctor! Thin, perhaps, like the Rose of Lima! Fat or thin, but without either the conscious over-development of a University athlete or the loose-bellied meanness of a city starveling—all portraying the equipoise of Christ!'

And again: 'Nevertheless the exaggerated difference between the clothes of men and women with which we are familiar to-day is essentially absurd. There is neither cause nor occasion for such differentiation. That all men, from King to street-arab, should wear the same uniform (coat, trousers, collar and tie—and other ridiculous gadgets) is absurd. That all women, from Queen to prostitute, should dress alike is absurd. But it is no less absurd that the clothes of men and women should be so different. Men and women have essentially the same physical structure and have therefore the same mode of progression and movement of limbs. Only in periods of com-

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mercialism and social cowardice, periods of philosophical confusion and religious disintegration, do we find such dead uniformity and such absurd differentiation between the sexes. But if the outward garb of men to-day is absurd, his undergarments are worse; they might almost be called foul. In this respect women's dress has not nearly reached a like absurdity or ugliness and, paradoxical though it may seem, it is more desirable that men should dress more as women do than that women should dress as men.

'The tyranny of the tailor must be abolished and that of the hosier laughed to scorn. It is still possible for women to dress themselves as befits human dignity. Men must regain the same privilege. It is still possible for women to buy clothes, even underclothes, which are made well, as works of art, because they are worth making. That such a thing is impossible in the case of men shows more clearly than anything else the absurdity of our civilization. As far as men's clothes are concerned the idea of art has been reduced to its lowest terms; the skill of the maker is all that is left to admire. It is not crime; it is folly.' Many of us surely must have felt that the modern complexion of human bondage is aptly symbolized by the terrible permanence of the trouser. And here is our doughty champion!

Eric Gill's writing is not always easy reading because though like a sound thinker he defines his terms, the definitions do not always coincide with those commonly accepted; and the definitions in earlier works are assumed in later. He has also a little too much the air of telling rather than arguing to be altogether acceptable to a sceptical modern. But for genuine thought-and-temper provoking matter let me seriously commend his essays and phillipics to the reader who is interested

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in this artist and in art. Perhaps a characteristic passage from 'A Preface about God' to the essay on *Sculpture* may give a clue to the temper of much of this vigorous and, shall we say, confident opinion:

'Renaissance, Reformation, Industrialism—these three are exactly antithetic to Poverty, Obedience, and Chastity—the new to the old. The Renaissance is essentially the acclamation of man, his power and riches. The Reformation is the refusal, the denial of authority, Industrialism, to which the Renaissance and Reformation inevitably proceed, is the whoredom in which man is exploited by man.

'The period of decay which the Renaissance ushered in began about four hundred and fifty years ago. It is now past repair. We are in a sinking ship and each man must save himself. There is no question even of "women and children first" for in this matter all are equal and no man can save another's soul.' (And here another highly characteristic footnote: 'We will not worry therefore about the Empire and the Board of Education. Nor even need we worry about the schools of art. They, we make no doubt, are doing their best to turn out artists who shall help England to achieve success in foreign markets and so hasten the next war.')

The first few pregnant sentences of this informing essay on right method may aptly conclude this brief introduction. It is an excellent example of the calmer didactic method of the artist-author, and gives a clue to the fundamental theory of his approach to his work. The whole essay with its commentary of crowding footnotes is packed with sound doctrine and criticism, though it does not long maintain the calm detachment of its opening:

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'The Sculptor's job is making out of stone things seen in the mind.

'A work of sculpture may resemble other things or it may not, but such resemblance is accidental not substantive. The study of Nature is not a necessity, though the love of Nature may be such. Nature is for the workman simply a dictionary, however well-beloved and inspiring, to which he may go for reference when necessary or when he chooses.

'Beauty is an absolute quality which, like Goodness and Truth, is apprehended by intuition. It behoves the workman therefore to beware of making things which savour not of the mind but of the senses. The use of living models, except merely for reference, is a very great danger; for the beauties of appearance seek to oust the beauties of thought and concern for accuracy of anatomical representation tends to oust concern for the beauty of the work in itself.

'What is important is what the workman has in his mind, not what some model has in his body. This is the attitude of mind of all the great periods of sculpture: not what they saw, but what they loved, that they carved. Truly they loved what they saw, but their seeing bent before their love as a sapling before the wind.'

This is obviously wise thinking and distinguished writing.

J. P. T.

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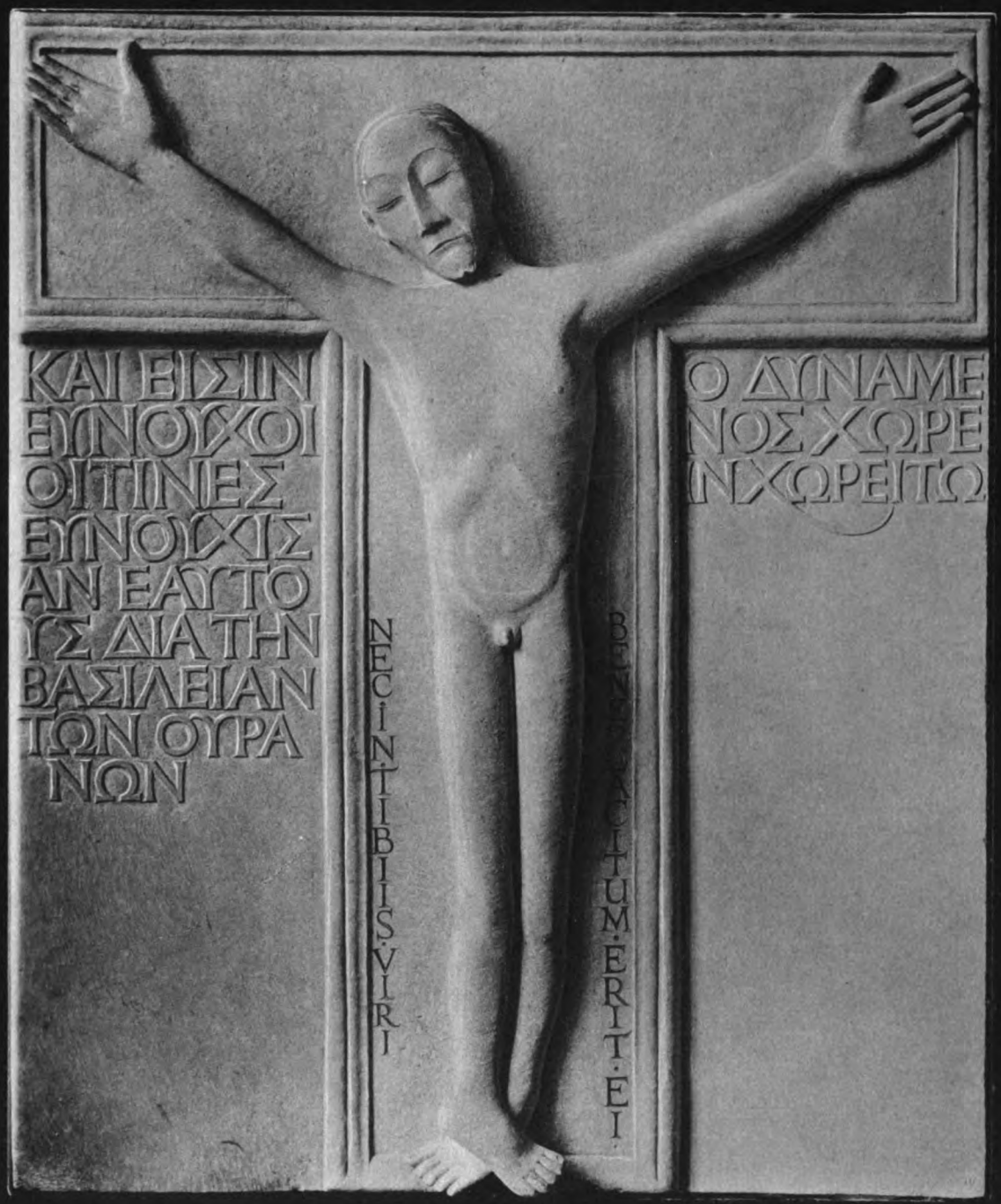

CRUCIFIX. Hopton Wood Stone. 3 ft. 6 in. high. 1910

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THE CONTORTIONIST. Hopton Wood Stone. 9 in. high. 1910

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CUPID. Portland Stone. 9 in. 1911

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FIGURE. Bath Stone. 7 in. high. 1912 ST. SIMEON STYLITES. Portland Stone. 1 ft. 6 in. high. 1912 Plate 4

A TUMBLER. Bath Stone. 6 in. high. 1913

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TOMBSTONE. Hopton Wood Stone. 5 ft. high. 1927

MADONNA AND CHILD. Portland Stone. 2 ft. high. 1912

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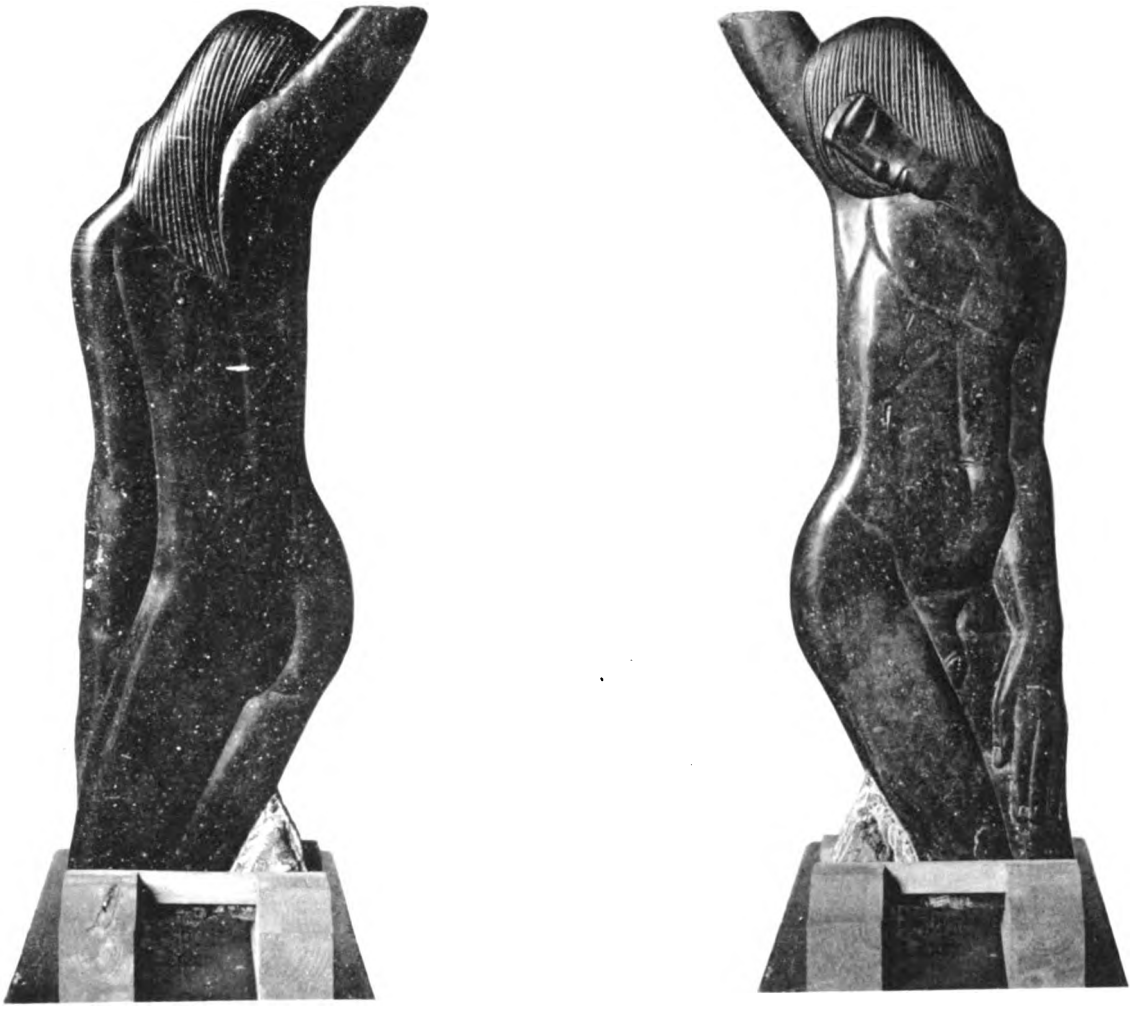

DEPOSITION. Black Hopton Wood Stone. 2 ft. high. 1924

THE GOLDEN CALF. Hopton Wood Stone, Gilded. 2 ft. long. 1912

Plate 6

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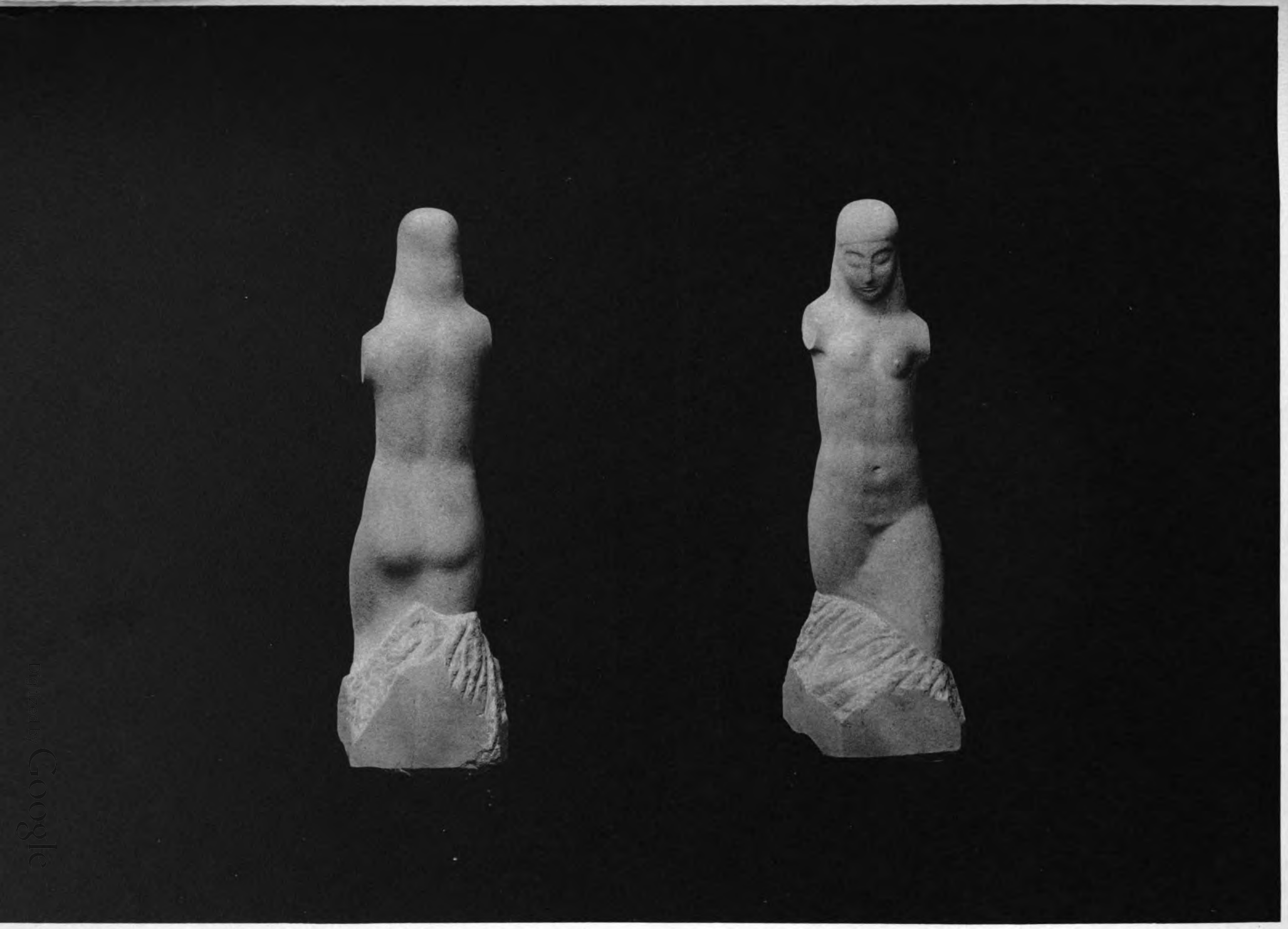

TORSO WITH HEAD. Bath Stone. 2 ft. high. 1913-5

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STATIONS: WESTMINSTER CATHEDRAL. Hopton Wood Stone. 5 ft. 8 in. by 5 ft. 8 in. 1914-8 Plate 8

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IX JESUS FALLS A THIRD TIME

XIV THE BODY OF JESUS IS LAID IN THE TOMB

STATIONS: WESTMINSTER CATHEDRAL. Hopton Wood Stone. 5 ft. 8 in. by 5 ft. 8 in. 1914-8

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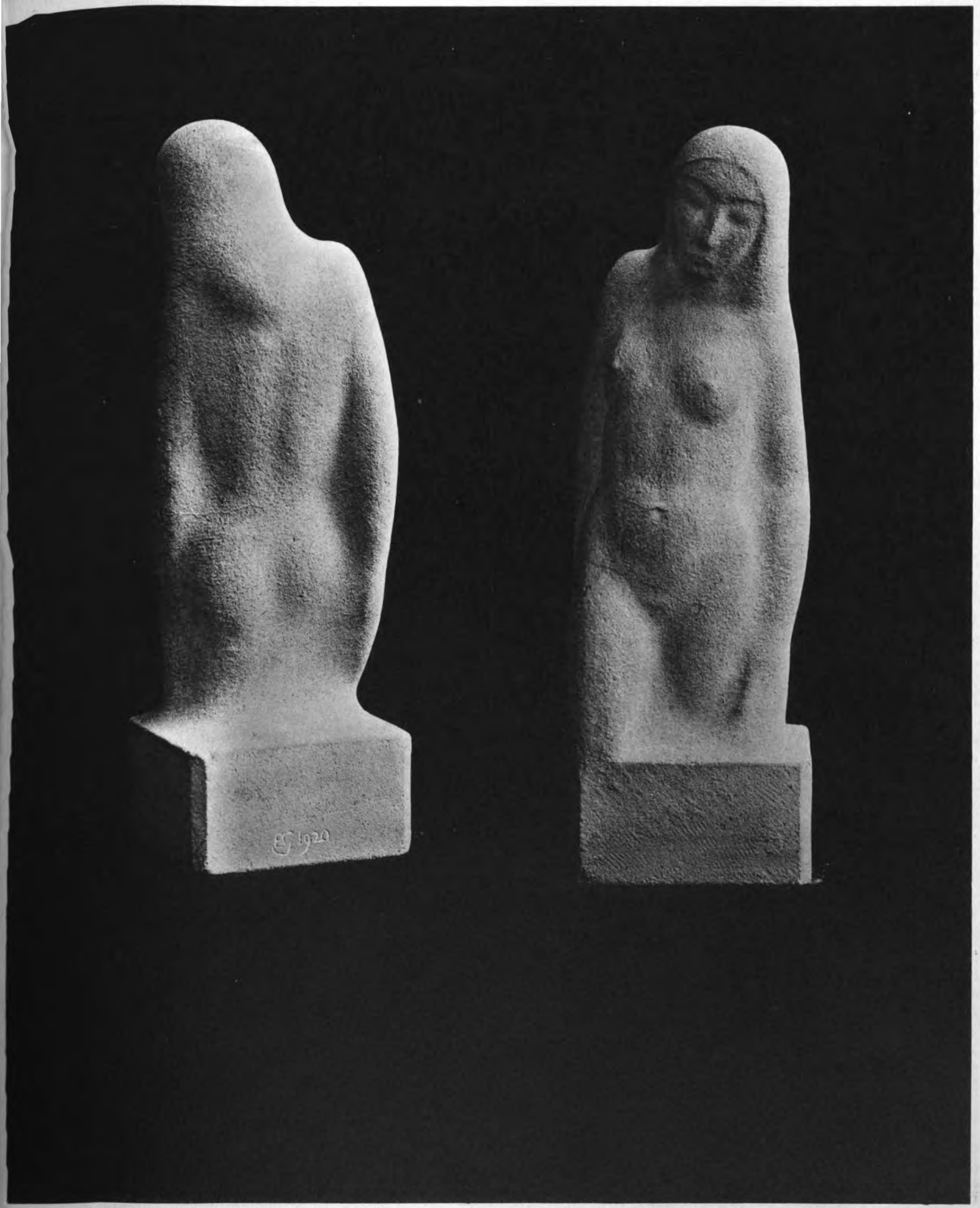

ANADYOMENE. Bath Stone. 2 ft. 6 in. high. 1920

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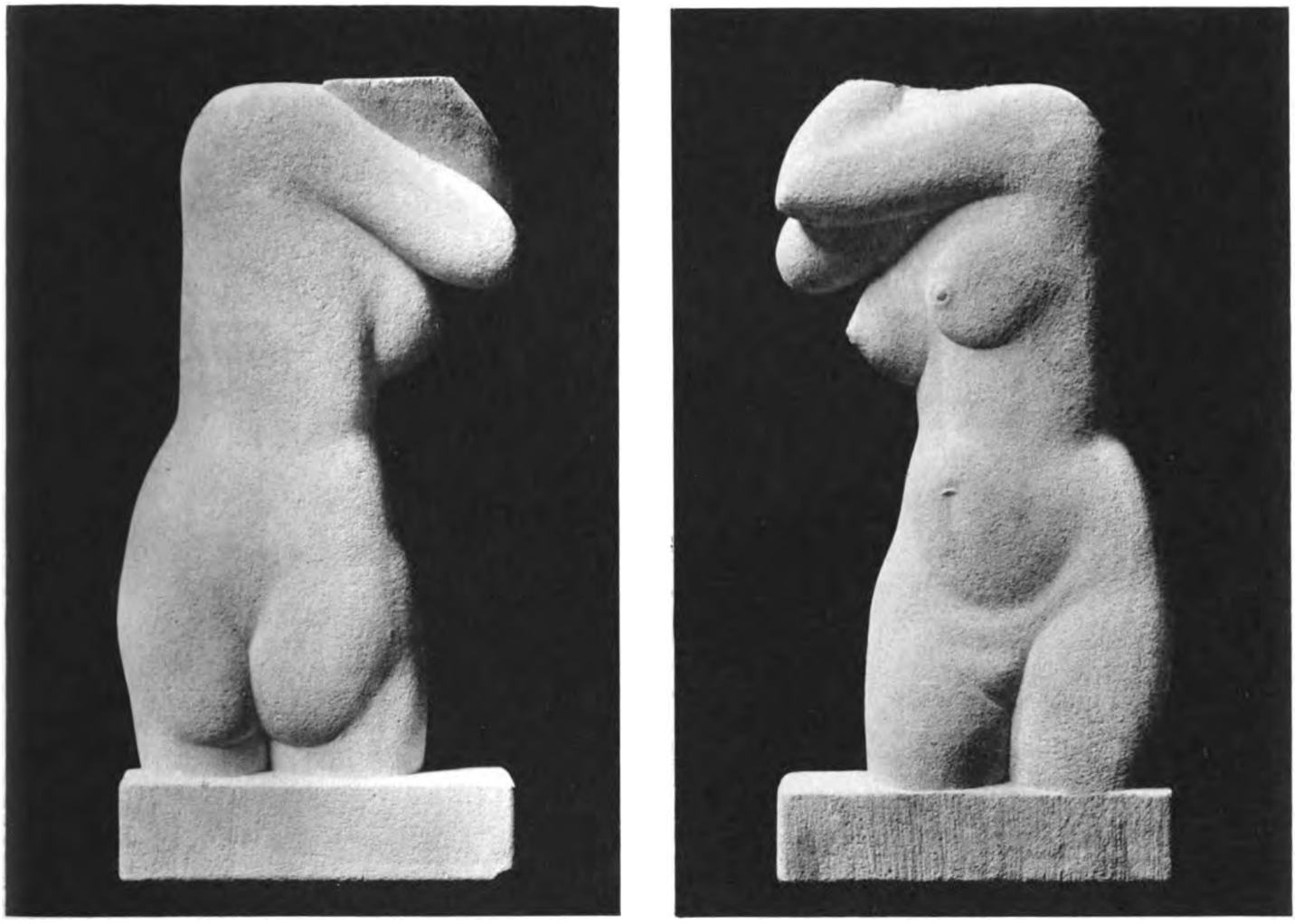

TORSO. Bath Stone. 1 ft. 9 in. high. 1920

Plate 11

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MOTHER AND CHILD. Beer Stone. 1 ft. 6 in. high. 1920 Plate 12

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STATION: BRADFORD. Beer Stone. A STUDY. 2 ft. 6 in. by 2 ft. 6 in. 1921 Plate 13

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STATIONS AT BRADFORD. Beer Stone. 2 ft. 6 in. by 2 ft. 6 in. 1921-4

Plate 14

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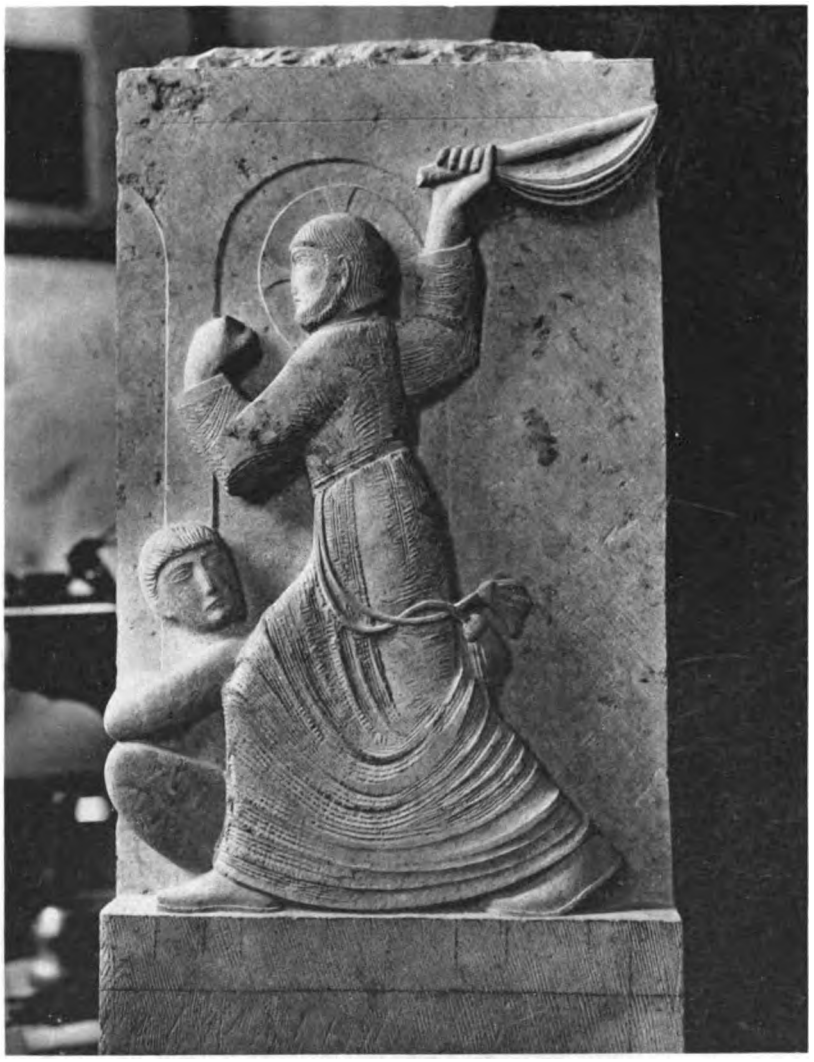
LEEDS UNIVERSITY WAR MEMORIAL. Portland Stone. 15 ft. by 5 ft. 6 in. 1922-3



STUDY for detail of above. 1922

Plate 15

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MADONNA AND CHILD. Ivory. 7 in. 1922

Plate 16

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[Coster]

NUDE. Ivory. 12 in. high. 1923

Plate 17

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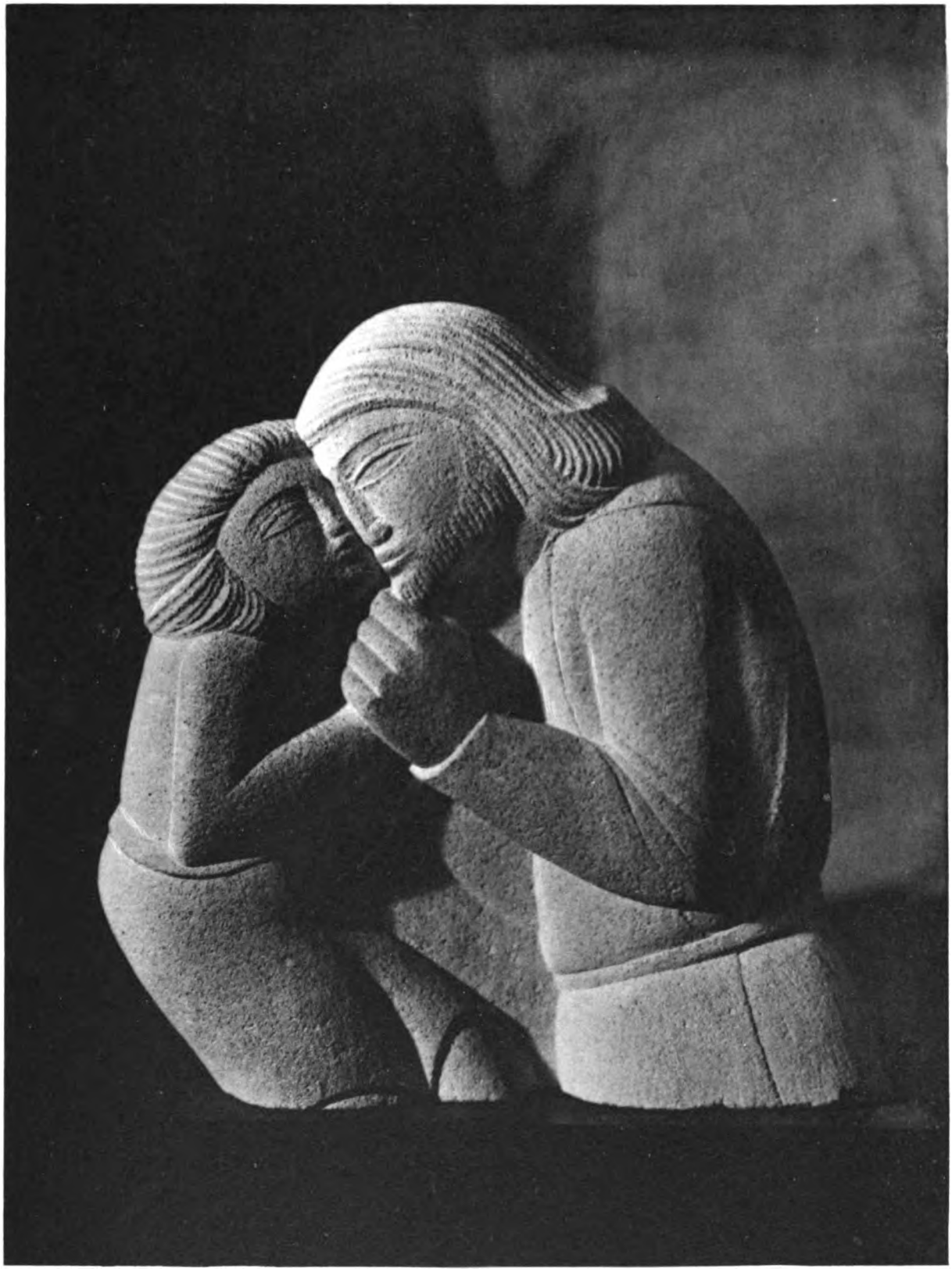

THE FOSTER FATHER. Bath Stone. 10 in. high. 1923 Plate 18

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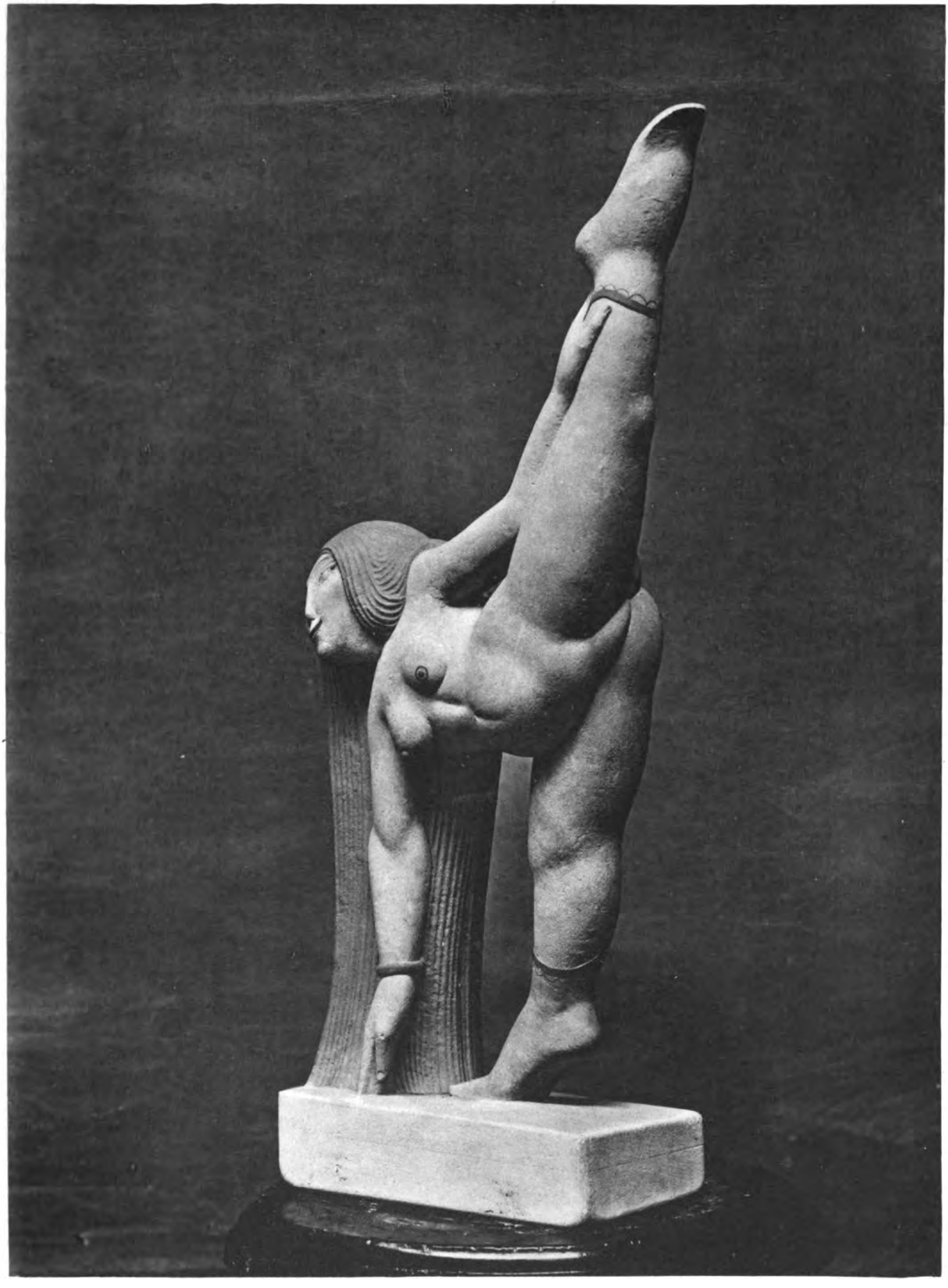

THE SPLITS. II. Beer Stone. 2 ft. high. 1923

Plate 19

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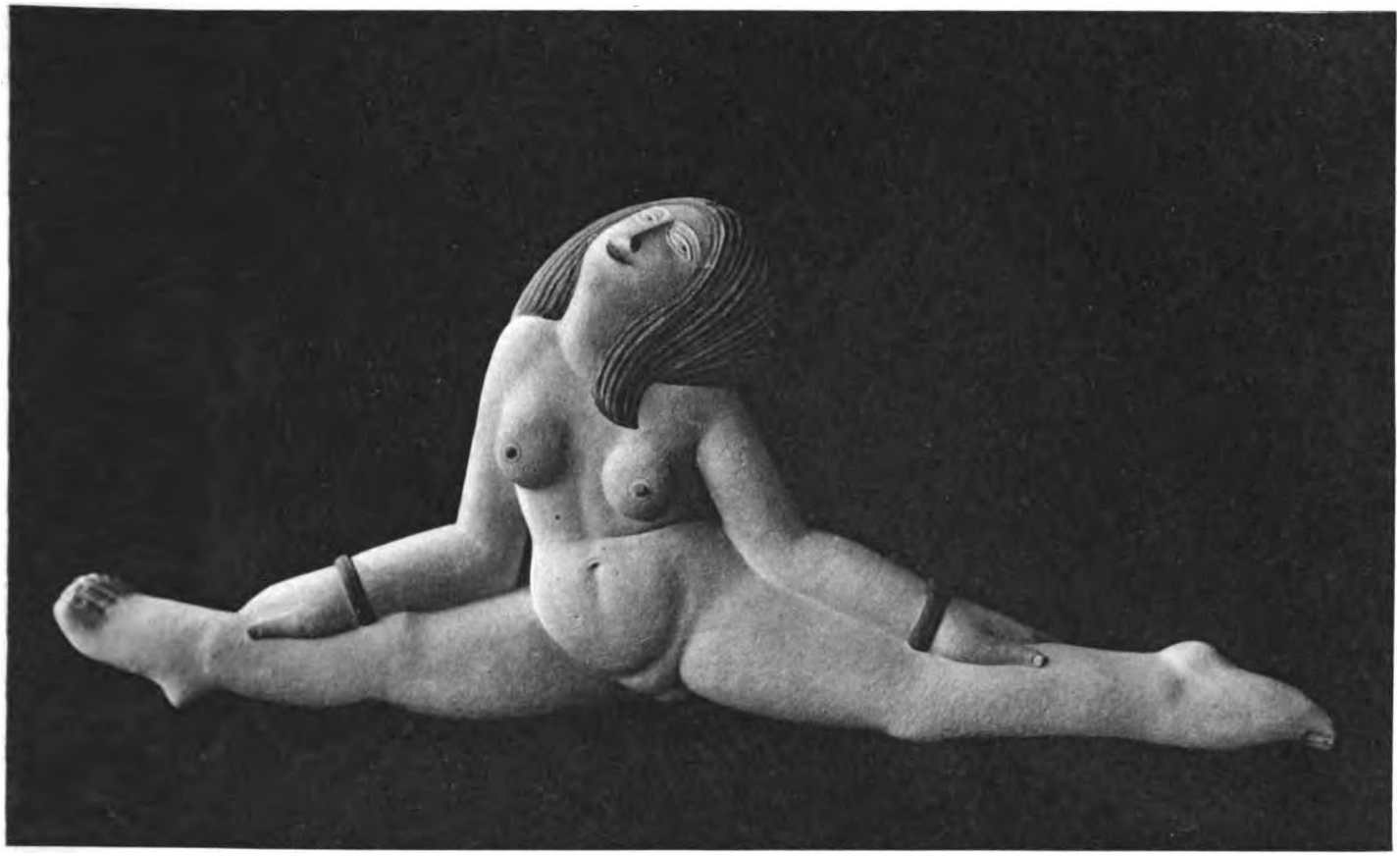

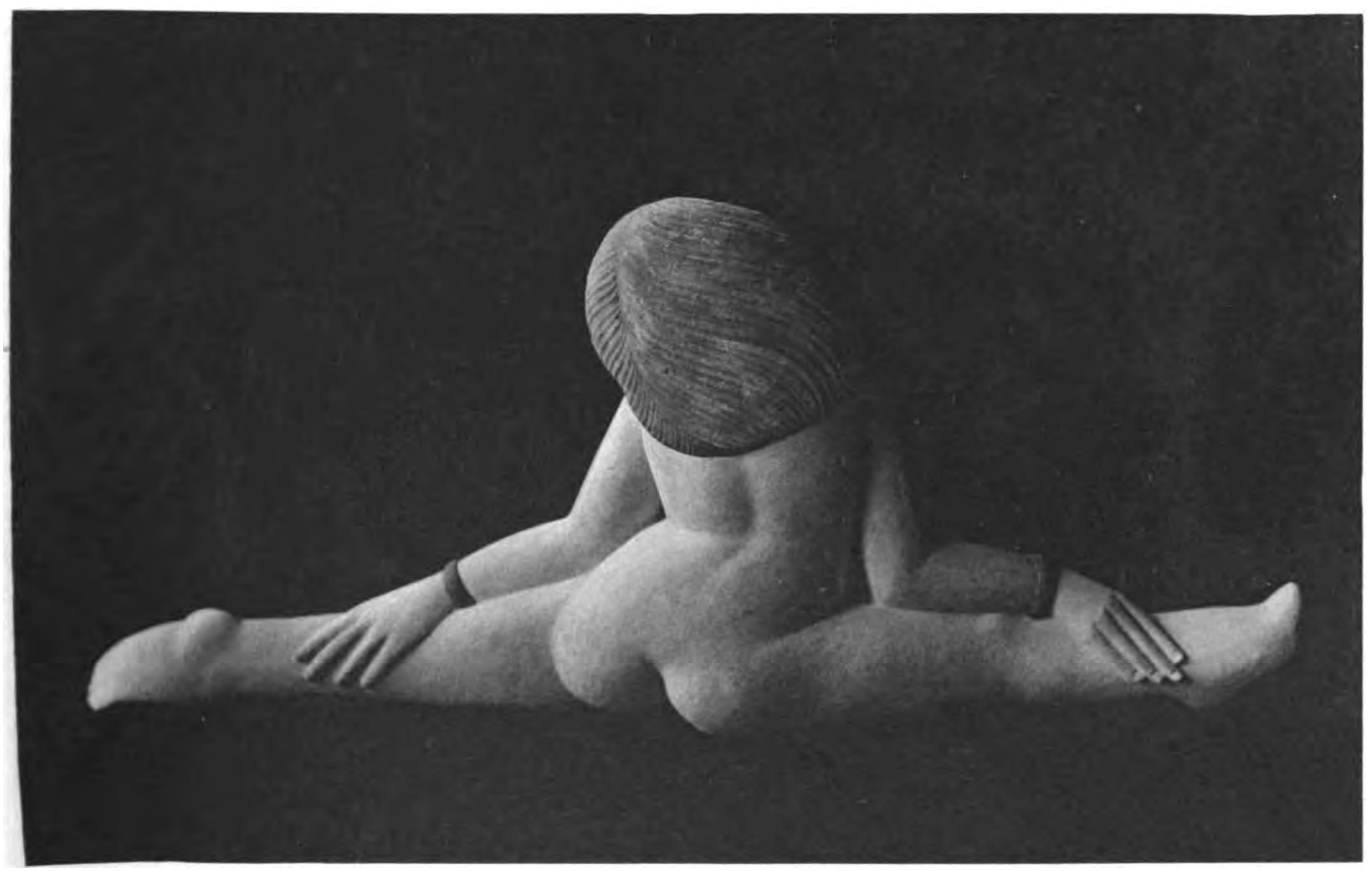

THE SPLITS. I. Beer Stone. 1 ft. 10 in. across. 1923 Plate 20

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CRUCIFIX. Portland Stone. 7 ft. 6 in. high. 1925

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GIRL. Capel-y-Ffin Stone. 3 ft. high. 1925

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TOBIAS AND SARA. Portland Stone. 2 ft. across. 1926

[COSTER]

Plate 23

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[COSTER]

CARYATID. Wellingtonia Pine. 8 ft. high. 1927

Plate 24

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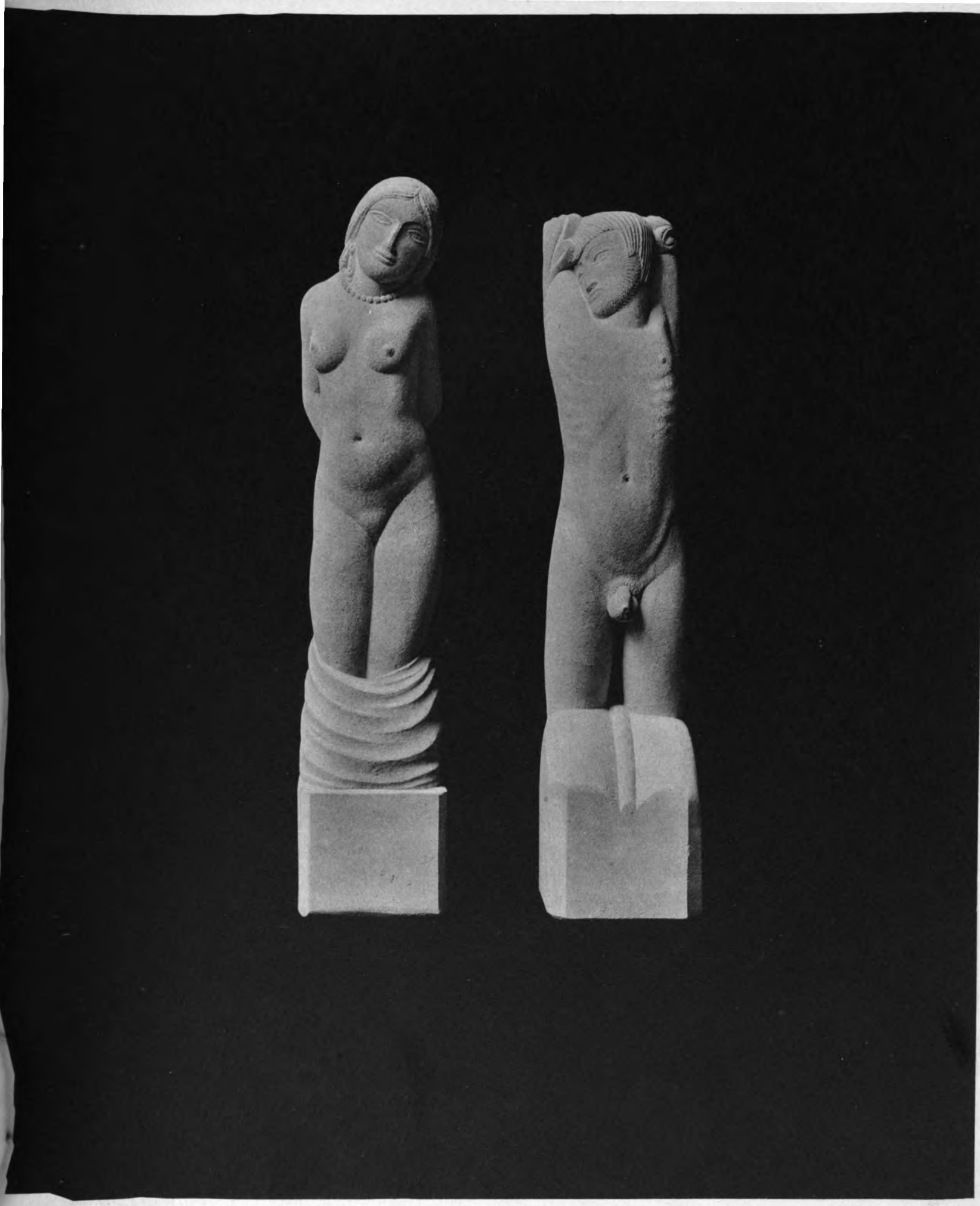

ADAM AND EVE. Bath Stone. 2 ft. 6 in. high. 1928

Plate 25

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GRAVESTONE. Portland Stone. 4 ft. by 1 ft. 6 in. 1928

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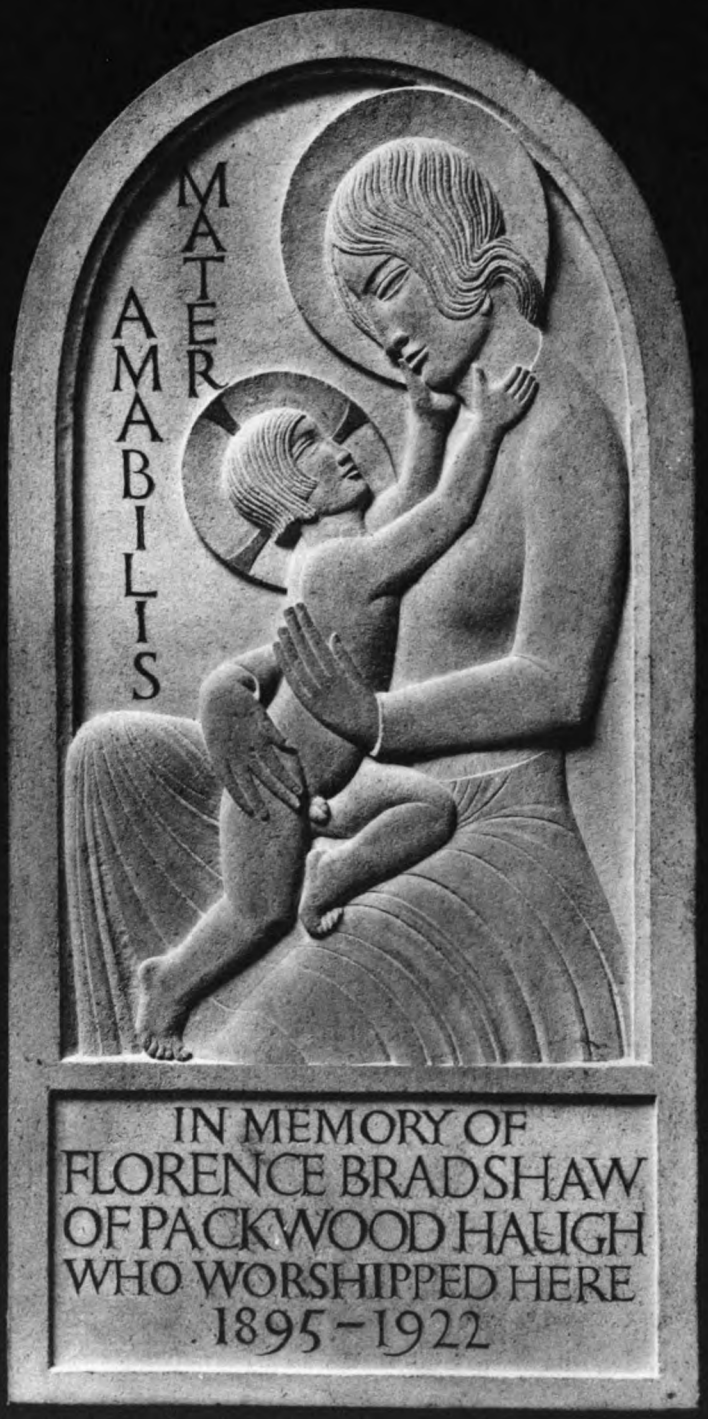

[COSTER]

MATER AMABILIS. Portland Stone. 2 ft. 3 in. high. 1928

Plate 27

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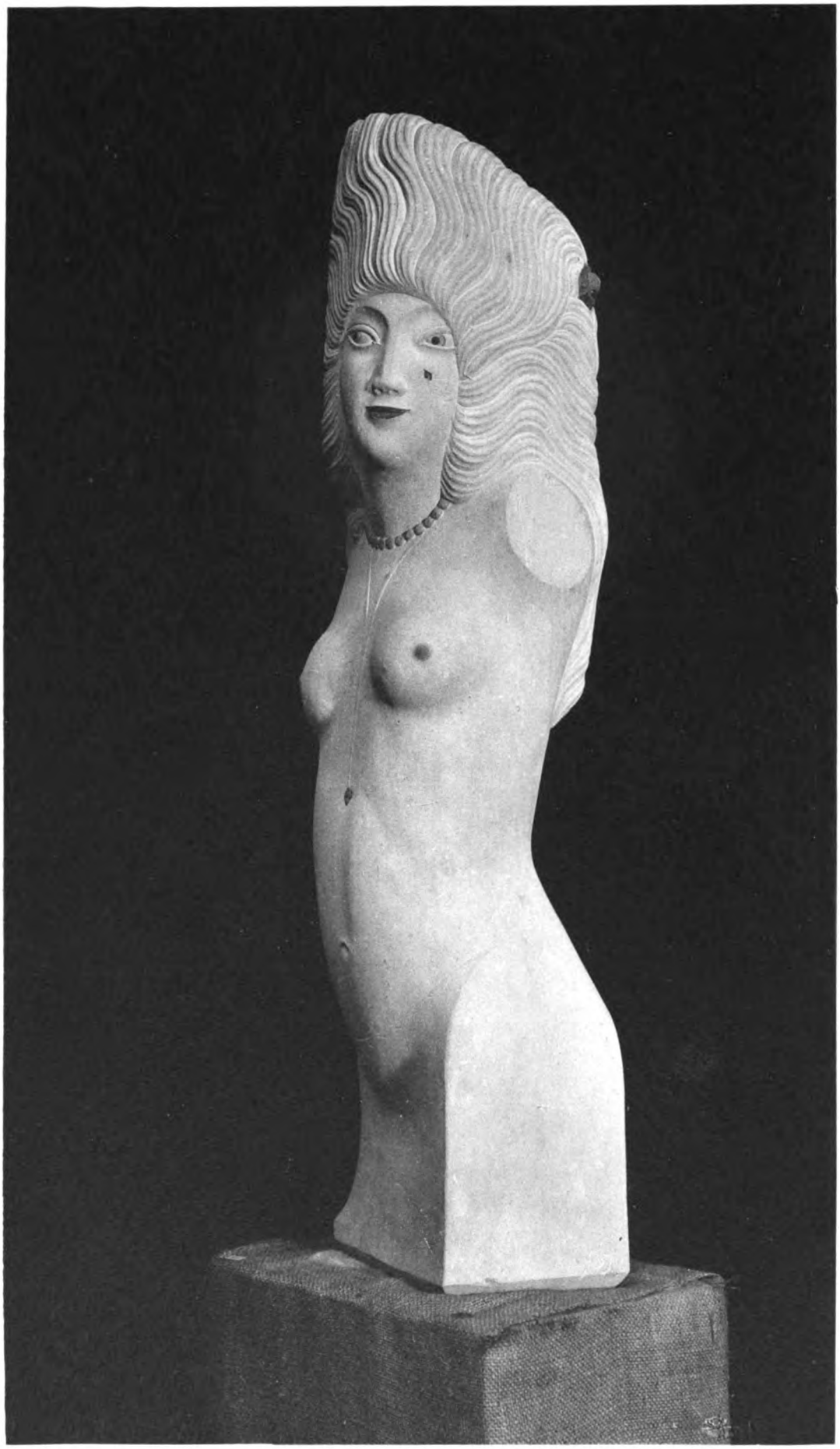

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THE HEADDRESS. Beer Stone. 2 ft. 8 in. high. 1928 Plate 28

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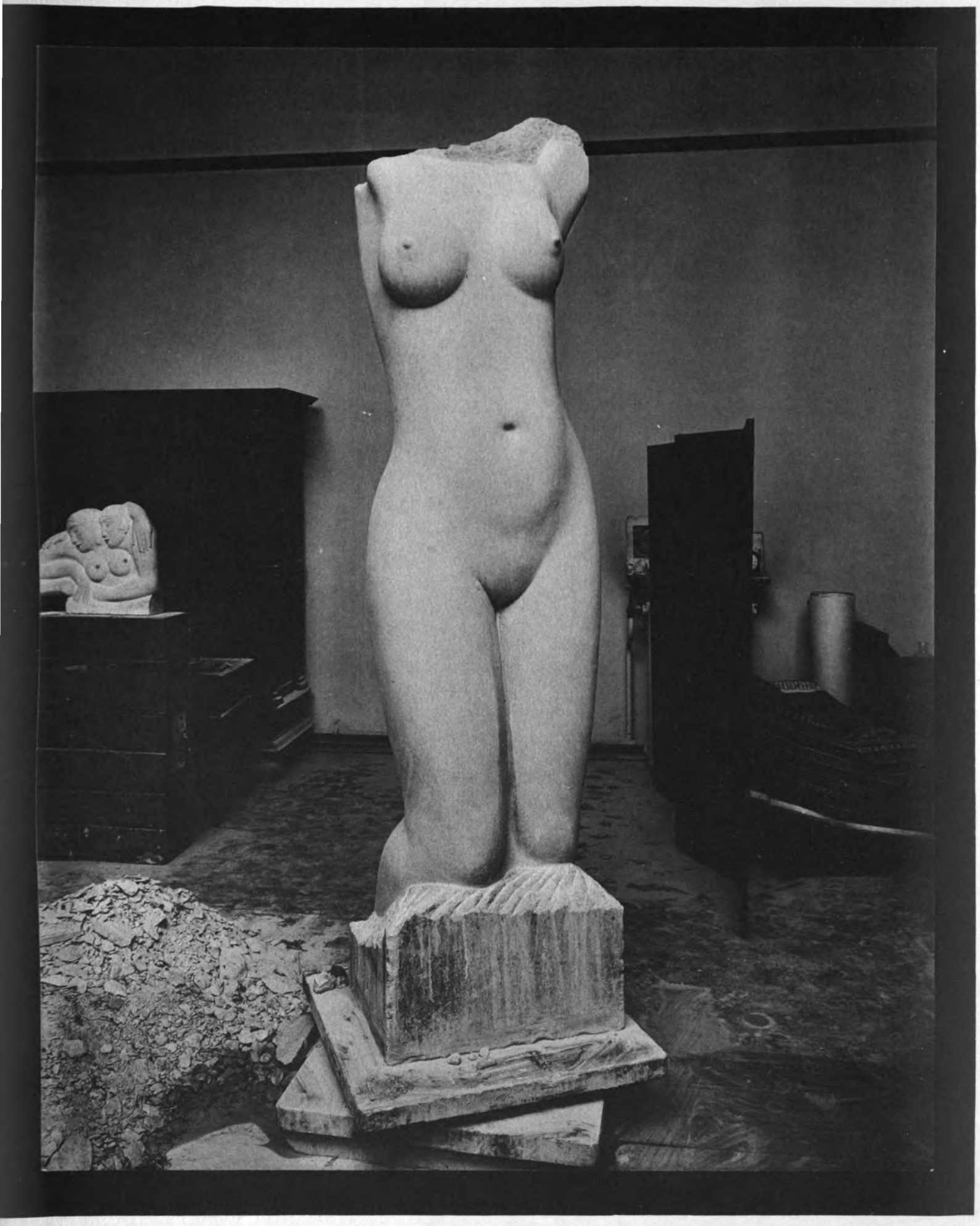

"MANKIND" (IN THE MAKING). Hopton Wood Stone. 8 ft. high. 1927-8

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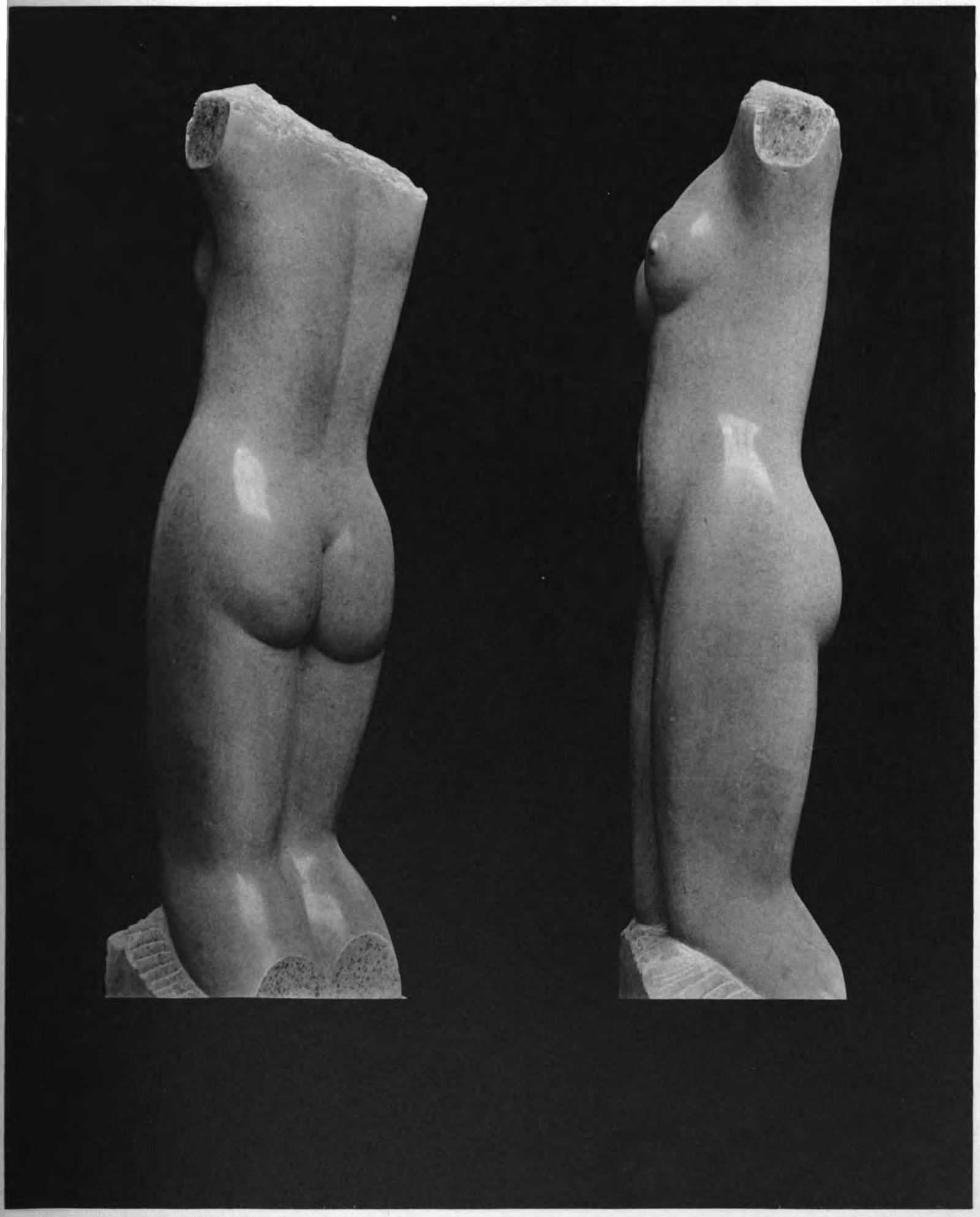

"MANKIND." Hopton Wood Stone. 8 ft. high. 1927-8

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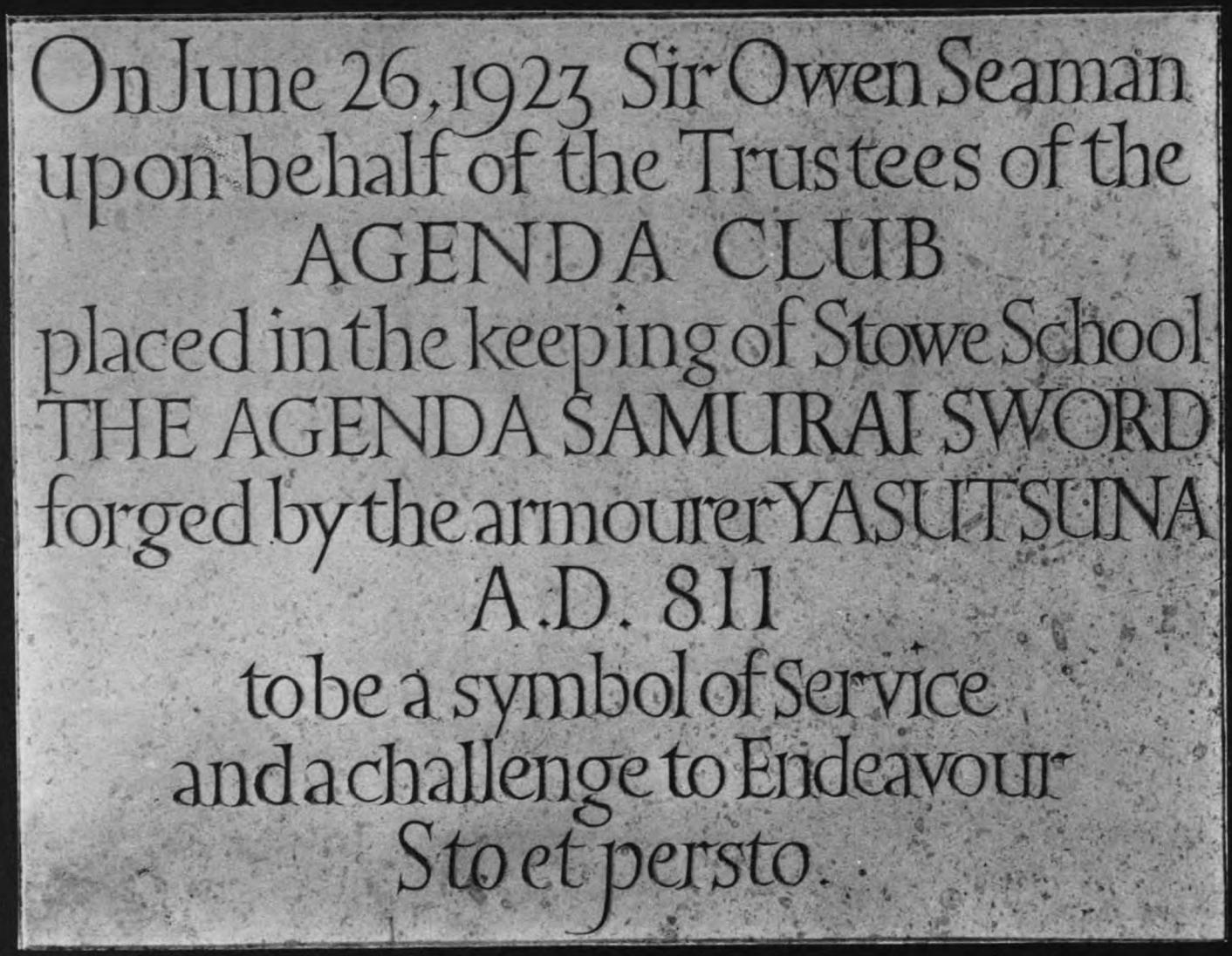

TABLET AT STOWE SCHOOL. Hopton Wood Stone. 11 by 14 in. 1923

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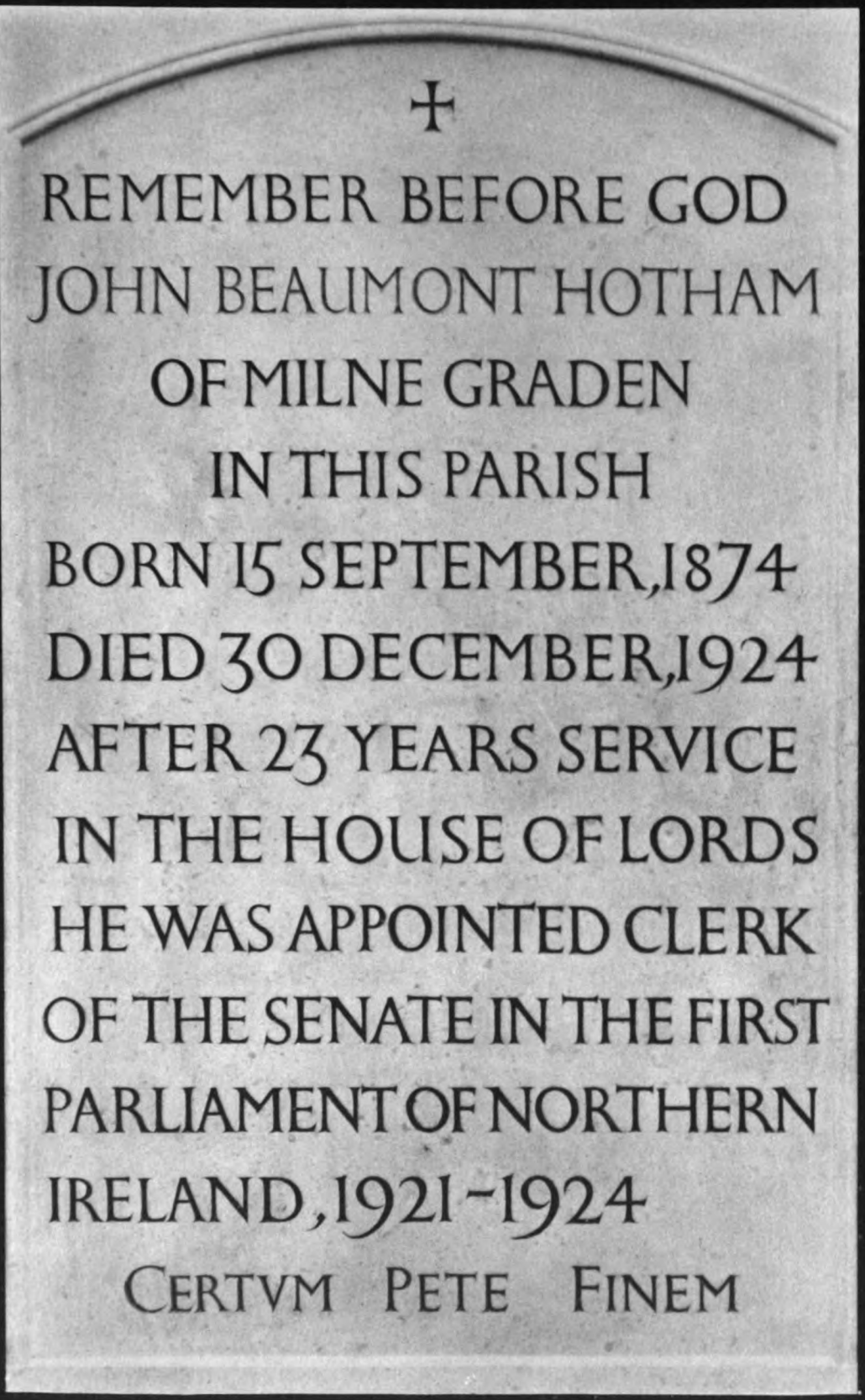

[COSTER]

MEMORIAL TABLET. Hopton Wood Stone. 2 ft. 7 in. by 1 ft. 7 in. 1928 Plate 32

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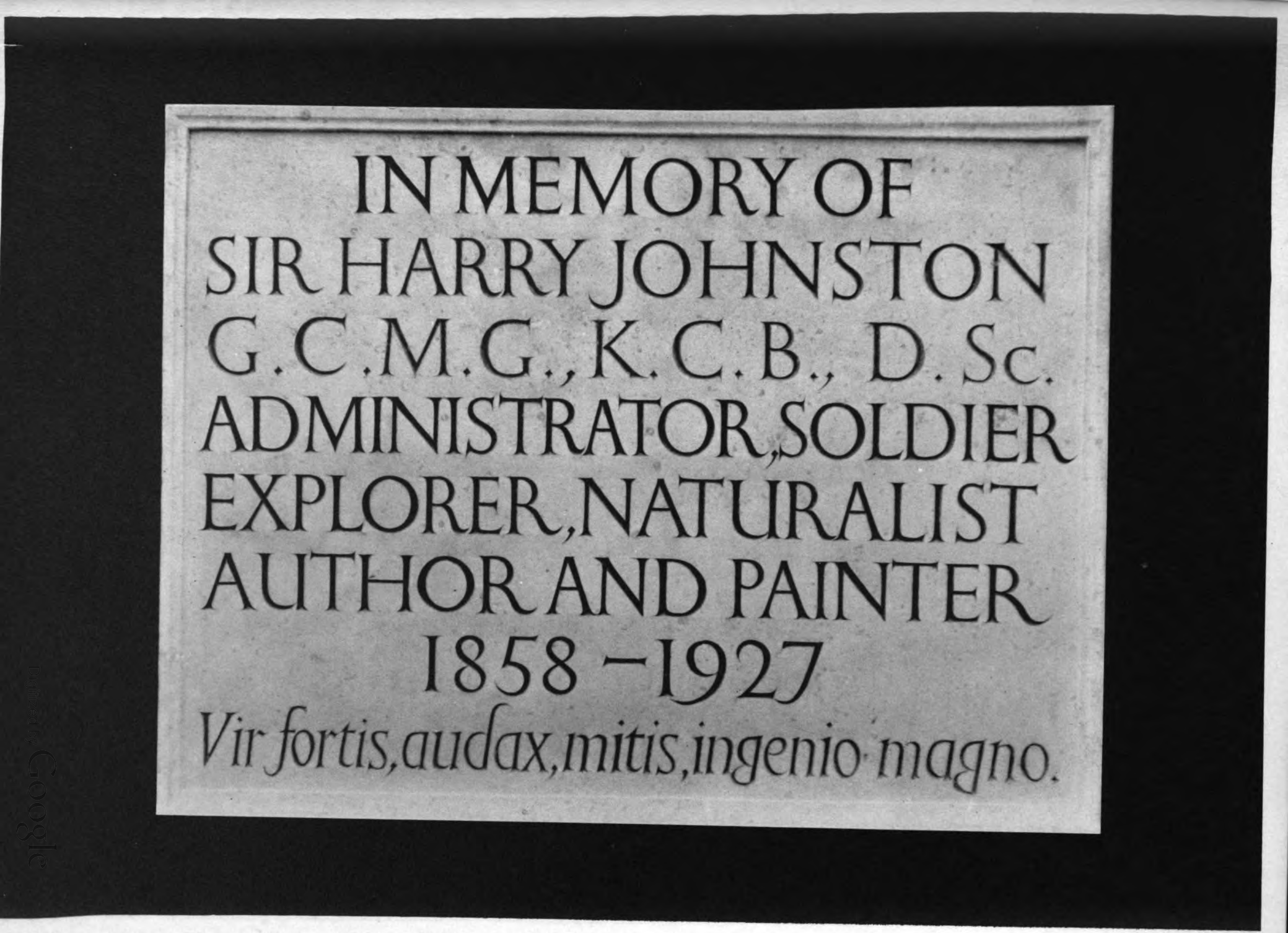

TABLET IN POLING CHURCH. Hopton Wood Stone. 1 ft. 4 in. by 1 ft. 9 in. 1928

[Coster]

Plate 33

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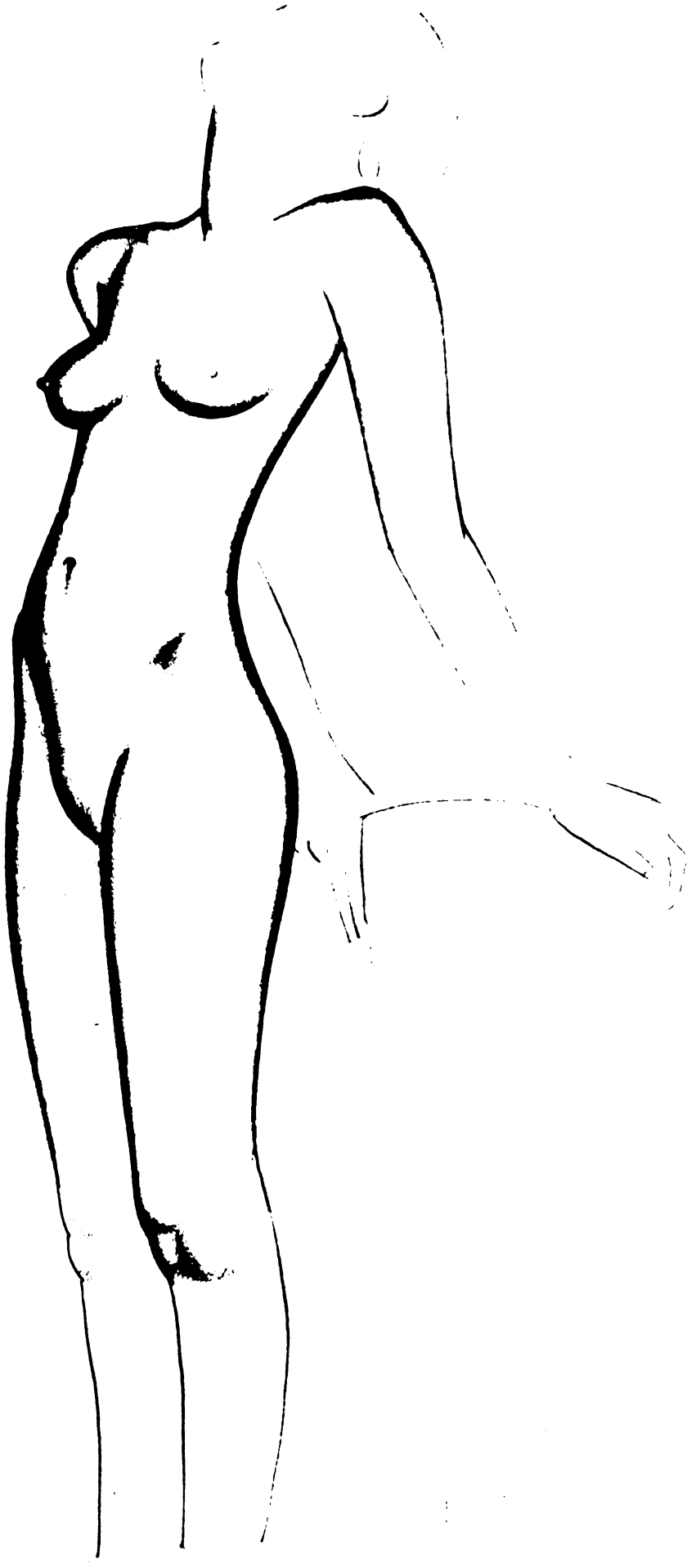

PENCIL DRAWING. 1927

[COSTER]

Plate 34

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PENCIL DRAWING. 1927

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Plate 35

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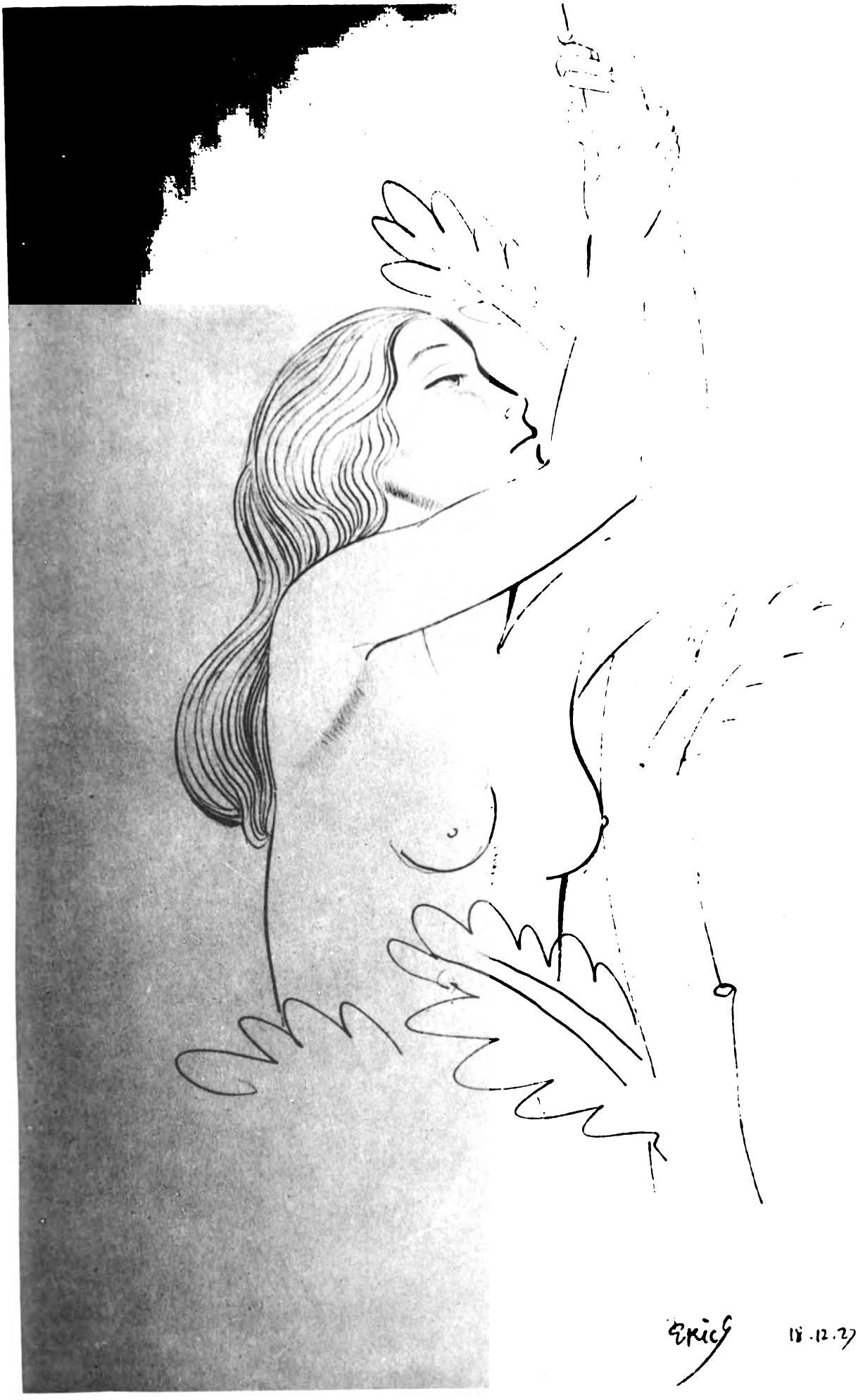

PENCIL DRAWING. 1927

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Plate 36

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[COSTER]

SELF-PORTRAIT BY THE ARTIST. 1927

Plate 37

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[COSTER]

THE STUDIO: CAPEL-Y-FFIN. Plate 38

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